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39574 L.C. POSSE Wicked Clowns Posed Photo
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39542 LED ZEPPELIN Stairway To Heaven
39539 LINKIN PARK Meteora Group Sitting Photo
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41771 METALLICA St. Anger Group Against Wall
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21818 KORN Logo
12217 LED ZEPPELIN Stairway
25975 M. MANSON Hollywood Group
19646 METALLICA Justice For All
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41540 MORBID ANGEL Group Photo
42104 MOTORHEAD England Skull
28458 MUDVAYNE Group Photo
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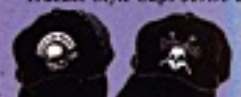

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42146 CRADLE OF FILTH Mannequin
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41111 HIM Tribal Heartagram Logo
41114 IN FLAMES Emblem Logo
40967 IRON MAIDEN Iron & Killer

40999 JUDAS PRIEST Screaming Vengeance
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40984 LED ZEPPELIN Silver Logo
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43074 MARILYN MANSON Hand Of Glory Art
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25475 MORBID ANGEL Logo
42998 MURDERDOLLS Blind Scout Logo
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37147 OPETH Logo
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42957 RAMMSTEIN Flaming Heart Logo
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42838 SHADOWS FALL Logo
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36269 CANNIBAL CORPSE Bloody Logo
42452 CRADLE OF FILTH Blood Red Logo
32098 DKT Logo
27371 COLD Logo
19490 DANZIG Tribal Skull
13835 DEFTONES Logo
27709 DRUDGE Logo
39484 DOWN Logo
40729 GODSMACK Sun Logo
28964 INSANE CLOWN POSSE Logo

13675 KORN Logo
43967 LAMB OF GOD Logo
42055 LINKIN PARK Street Artist Photo
13684 MARILYN MANSON Logo
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32156 MISFITS Classic White Skull
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40944 DEFTONES Calligraphy Deftones Logo
42530 D. BORGIR Logo/Satan We Trust XL Only
41316 GODSMACK Flaming Sun Logo
38788 HATEBREED A Call For Blood/Vengeance
42110 HIM Hwes Heartagram Logo
41115 IN FLAMES Emblem Logo
40949 INSANE CLOWN POSSE The Wraith
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42943 SHADOWS FALL SF Star Logo/Logo
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41225 L.C. POSSE Running Hatchetman Guy
42949 KILL ENGAGE Black/Skull Nails Logo
24162 KITTIE Black/Logo
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38487 OZZY OSBOURNE Logo
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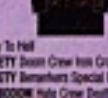

32002 AC/DC Highway To Hell
39658 B. LABEL SOCIETY Doom Crew Iron Cross
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ART BY JOYCE CHIN; COLORS BY CHIP ZDARSKY

VAMPED

From *Bite Club*

ART BY DAVID HAHN

So much has happened! So much is going on! It's an amazing time to be in anything these days!

Let's see: we survived the San Diego Comic-Con this past July. The insanity of that show just invigorates me and my team to do more, see more, attempt and accomplish more! It was great to meet and greet with the fans, and to see and hear reactions to our various projects.

OK, down on the movie front, we have the excellent *Shaun of the Dead*. There's a review in The Vault, but let me just back that up: Yes! You should see this! The guys involved, Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg, are just huge fans of the classic Romero movies that you can't help but fall in love with this movie. Multiple viewings are a must. The UK crowd has already been exposed to *Shaun* and can vouch for it.

We also have our big feature this month on *Saw*. Coming from seemingly out of nowhere, James Wan and Leigh Whannell break the traditions of horror films to hit close to home with this psychological thriller. Taking traditional horror movie shots, but melding it with a bitter mystery, Wan and Whannell offer a twisted look at a serial killer and his victims. *Saw* is a disturbing movie, and both guys should be complimented on their efforts.

I'm also proud to announce that the website will have fresh and new content. A lot of it will be extended interviews from the magazine. You can find the URLs at the end of some stories. We'll build up the link list and make sure you can find all the phenomenal stuff we're introducing you to in within these pages.

There's so much I want to share with you, and only so much space and time! Check it all out, let me know what you think and get back here next issue, when we just unfold more for your perusal.

Can you tell I'm excited?

Vampirella

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CONTRIBUTORS

Providing the first comics story this issue, "The Robin Syndrome" (page 11), a dark and exciting moment in Vampirella history is author **Jim Catapano**, a regular contributor to this magazine, and **Joyce Chin**, an accomplished comics artist who has an insatiable passion for Vampirella. Chin's work has appeared in a wide range of titles, including *Xena*, Superman and *Witchblade*. She's presently working on a special for Dynamic Forces. Catapano's first book, *A Stirring of Shadows*, was released last year. His next, *The Horror of Lighthouse Hill*, will see print this fall from PublishAmerica.

Mike Conley is a mainstay in the Vampirella universe and his work often goes unnoticed. Mike's our letterer and does a fine job putting the words together. His talent graces "The Robin Syndrome" this time out.

Regular contributors **Patrick Keller** and **Tom LaSusa** clock in with a couple of interviews this issue: Patrick got the goods on Howard Chaykin (page 27) and Tom was broken by Chip Zdarsky (page 38). When not slaving away for us, Patrick writes the "Addicted to Bad" column on moviepeepshoot.com and is the editor-in-chief for Shannon Wheeler's *Too Much Coffee Man* magazine. Tom's day job is an editor/producer for Network Computing Magazine, the rest of his time is spent with his twin boys, Thing 1 and Thing 2.

Chip Zdarsky is, um, unique. Check out his interview in Flesh & Blood on page 38. Vampirella meets Chip's *Monster Cops* in "Indecent Proposal" on page 39.

SCARLET LETTERS

CALLS IN THE DARKNESS

Dear Scarlet Letters,
Vampirella #6 was great. I loved the Vampirella comic stories "The Convent" and "Night Boat to Drakulon." At first I thought you turned Vampi into a mad killer in "The Convent" until the end when I found out she killed off vampire nuns. I couldn't understand that story because the nuns were in mass with a big crucifix in front of them. Vampires don't like crosses. Reading "Night Boat to Drakulon" it looked to me like Vampirella wants to find a way to get back to her home planet. Is Vampi going to leave earth and go back home to Drakulon? I'd like to see a Vampirella crossover with Logan the Wolverine and with Dragula, Queen of Darkness. I'd also like to see Adam Van Helsing come back to the Vampirella comics. I know you have to keep the comics dress code seal because of young people who buy the magazine, but I'd like to see a little nudity and clothing ripping in fights. It would be great to see naked demons fight Vampirella. My favorite women in comics have been Vampirella, Little Annie Fanny, Spider-Woman and Natasha Romanoff, The Black Widow, and I would like to see comic crossovers with other comic women with Vampirella. Before I end this letter, I want to say that I loved the new poster of Kitana Baker as Vampirella. I think Kitana is great.
John Pilauskas

We know Little Annie Fanny v Vampirella would be a blockbuster showdown, but it'll have to wait till we get Round 2 of Vampirella/Witchblade out of the way! Look for it at your local comic shop this fall!

Dear Vampirella,
Earlier this week, a friend and I went to an all-night restaurant after clubbing. I sat facing the door and, to my horror, in walked a fat girl wearing a tube top. I won't even get on my soap box about why fat women feel the need to flaunt what they don't have, embarrass themselves and disgust others, but the hideous image stuck in my mind all the way home. I had to stare at my poster of Kitana for a while to erase the imprint of that fat girl who desperately needs help shopping for clothes. Please say thank you to Kitana for me helping out in this regard.

That being said, I think this would be a good time to mention something...you are always encouraging female fans to send in photos of themselves as Vampirella, so why don't you market Vampirella costumes? I bet you would receive a lot more photos if girls didn't have to make the costumes themselves! I have a couple of model friends myself and I'm pretty sure they would love to have a Vampirella costume! If you do this, however, don't make them in a size that hippos can wear!

Aside from that, the magazine is looking good, but could you devote a few more pages to Vampirella herself? The amount of pages we're getting is as skimpy as her costume!

For the upcoming Vampirella/Witchblade project, I would love it if you could do a cover with Kitana posing with Yancy Butler, but I doubt that will happen. However you all never fail to make Halloween awesome!

Thanks, and keep Vampirella coming our way!
Bruce Williamson
PS: Did I call that girl fat? Shame on me! I meant "calorically challenged."

We're sure Kitana's glad to have been of service.

First off, I love the magazine and am glad to see Vampi back. But I have a real beef with your Texas Chainsaw Massacre "reviewer"- Boni Alimagno (BA). I am a big time horror movie buff. And no one likes to see a classic get remade, because in the past it has proven to end up crap. Great musical scores replaced with whatever's popular on MTV pop/rock and rap. And cast by whoever the current "hunk" or "hottie" is. Jessica Biel is currently popular and from the WB, but at least she didn't look like she had walked out of a beauty salon in every scene. She looked like a girl on a summer road trip with her pot-head friends. They looked dirty and sweaty. It was very realistic. As for the Texas thing, BA focused on it in his review more than the movie did. I know plenty of hardcore horror movie buffs, even the guys at Creaturecorner.com, were okay with this remake. And we are all fans of the original and have been for over twenty years. So for this review coming from someone who hadn't even seen the original until recently, there was too much time spent on making fun of the movie and making smart-ass comments. It was a good movie and broke the mold on people always saying "remakes suck." It proves remakes don't always suck.
John Perkins

Don't worry John. We here at the Magazine don't always get BA's jokes either. But we'll let Smart-Ass himself respond: "Sorry, I got tweaked and took it out on the Lone Star state. New Jersey: YOU'RE NEXT! But really, I was just upset they actually found any time in the movie to keep Jessica Biel dry. Seriously, has anyone seen Summer Catch? *If we ever see her anything less than COMPLETELY SOAKED, it would be an offense to all mankind!"*

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! DROP US A LINE ANY WAY YOU CAN!
SCARLET LETTERS, VAMPIRELLA COMICS MAGAZINE, 1115 BROADWAY 8TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10010, OR VIA E-MAIL AT COMICS@HARRIS-PUB.COM

SAN DIEGO SPECIAL REPORT!

AT STAKE

SUCCULENT MEDIA MORSELS

BEGIN AGAIN

David Goyer, writer of next year's ***Batman Begins***, had the unenviable task of assuring the 6500 people crammed into Hall H at the San Diego Convention Center that he wasn't going to be the next person to screw up a Batman movie. "I've written the movie I've always wanted to see," he told the incredulous audience.

While Batman himself, Christian Bale (*American Psycho*), and director Christopher Nolan (*Memento*) didn't show up for the panel (though Nolan did appear at Wizard's Chicago Con, due to the proximity of some location shooting) they did send along a videotaped message hammering home the panel's theme: This isn't going to be like any Batman you've seen before.

Begins is set 10 years before the previous movies. While he remained tightlipped about the movie's plot, Goyer did say its tone borrowed heavily from classic Batman tales: Denny O'Neil's work in the 70's, Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's *The Long Halloween* and Frank Miller's *Batman: Year One*.

Originally Goyer didn't want to do the script, he was too busy directing *Blade: Trinity*. He'd even told Nolan he'd give him his plot ideas for free. But Nolan was relentless: Goyer was his man and eventually he wore him down enough to get him on board.

Brooding Batty Bale

The only other principal from the movie to join Goyer for the panel was Cillian Murphy (*28 Days Later*) who plays Dr. Jonathan Crane, aka the Scarecrow. Murphy was asked about his costume, but was soon shut up by Goyer. All Murphy could say was, again, it's not like anything you've seen before.

Someone then asked Goyer why the Batmobile resembles a tractor. Goyer was mum, saying every decision had to do not with merchandizing but how it would serve the story. The demanding fans seemed relieved to hear that.—BA

THE LOOKING GLASS

Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean, long known for producing breakthrough comics together, are producing a feature film: ***MirrorMask*** for Jim Henson Company. They made a short appearance at San Diego Comic-Con to update an expectant audience on the film's progress.

The movie follows Helena, a child of circus performers. When she grows tired of growing up under the Big Tent she lashes out at her mother, demanding a "real life." Her mother soon becomes gravely ill, and Helena blames herself. She dreams of entering a strange world where she's put on a quest for a mask that might cure a dying queen.

Gaiman told the story of screening a rough cut for Sony Pictures executives the night before. Afterwards one of them described the movie as "Beauty and the Beast on acid. But for kids."

Based on clips shown, McKean's computer-generated world certainly fits that description. Albino penguins, wild flocks of books, evil Jacks-in-the-Box singing "Close to You"—all retain the disturbing feel McKean brings to any of his images.

McKean himself though was utterly exhausted from animating so much. "Every possible thing has gone wrong," he deadpanned. Gaiman added that over the last year McKean had turned into Lurch from the Addams Family. McKean's pain will soon be over though. *MirrorMask* is expected in select theaters this winter.—BA

SHE'S A LADY

"There's no censoring the subject matter: 95 percent of the film takes place in Hell." With a few short words, director/producer Andrew Orjuela establishes what fans can expect from the long awaited release of ***Lady Death: The Motion Picture*** from ADV Films. "Some people may argue that I may have gone over the top in a few scenes, but I can't tell." Slated for an October 5th straight-to-DVD release, this animated feature focuses on a modified origin for Lady Death. Most impressive is Hope's transition into the titular character, a gradual process that can only be fully realized in animation. Each step in her extensive training brings further evidence of her transformation, from the pallor of her skin to various physical enhancements. That's right: As Lady Death's power grows, so does her cup size, a character insight missing for far too long. The manga-esque style of the movie is subtle enough to avoid exaggerated features allowing for easy recognition of characters while providing the fresh look and high-impact action sequences the form is known for. —TP&BA

Pumped Rocks

MIRRORMASK © JIM HENSON COMPANY. GAIMAN & MCKEAN, BATMAN BEGINS © WARNER BROS. LADY DEATH © BRIAN PULIDO/AVEN FILMS; CEMETARY GATES, BOO © GRAVEYARD FILMS; LOST BOYS © WARNER HOME VIDEO; FRIDAY THE 13TH © PARAMOUNT; CHUCKY © ROGUE PICTURES

GRAVE ENTERPRISE

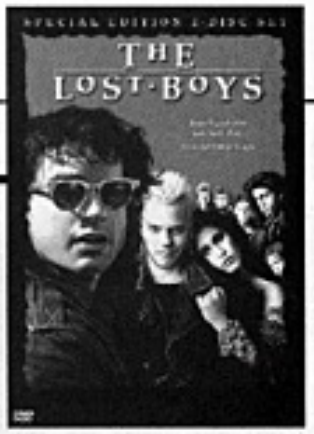
David E. Allen, producer of werewolf cult favorite *Dog Soldiers*, launches his new film company, Graveyard Film Works, with two flicks, both slated for Halloween.

Gore-fest ***Cemetery Gates*** is described by director Roy Knyim as a throwback to those great 80's monster movies with "[a] guy in a suit, kids in the woods, 17 deaths, 80 gallons of blood, 90 minutes." A low-tech creature feature about an ill-fated genetic experiment involving a Tasmanian devil, the trailer promises more laughs than shrieks.

The chills come with writer/director Anthony C. Ferrante's ***Boo***. Tired of the same old haunted houses, a group of friends break into an abandoned hospital looking for the real thing, and then have to figure out what to do once they find it. Filmed in an actual abandoned hospital, stories of crying babies and vanishing visitors suggest an atmosphere of suspense no backlot can provide.—TP

LITTLE BOYS LOST

Coreys Now and Then (below)



To celebrate the release of ***The Lost Boys: Two Disc Special Edition***, the premier tag-team of 80's teen movies, Corey Feldman and Corey Haim reunited to the delight of hundreds of San Diego Con attendees. Yes, The Coreys are back.

Feldman and Haim, each wearing sunglasses almost through the entire panel, kept the event lively sharing tales of their on-set hijinks and all the mayhem they caused.

Feldman recalled director Joel Schumacher telling him to "Butch it up a little bit." He responded by growing out his hair and overdosing on Rambo and Chuck Norris flicks.

Haim remembered the time a man knocked on their door at 2:00 a.m. wanting them to see what was in his big black bag. They thought it was a bomb, but it turned out to just be beer and all he wanted was to party.

Whether those in the audience were reliving the 80's or just discovering that which is The Coreys for the first time, they found an extremely appreciative pair, delighted again to be the center of someone's universe. —BA

GOING TO SEED

Tilly Talks

So why did **Jennifer Tilly**, the voice of Tiffany in *Bride of Chucky*, reprise the role for the upcoming, much anticipated sequel ***Seed of Chucky***? "The paycheck," she told the panel audience. But really, she continued, she "turned into a Chucky fanatic." Tilly and Chucky puppeteer, Tony Gardner, screened several clips from the movie which Tilly says is "really gruesome, don't get me wrong, but it's also a heartwarming story."

But, says Gardner, "chances are, if you're not a puppet, you're not going to make it." –BA

JASONS UNMASKED

Forget New York. San Diego was taken by a gaggle of **Jasons**. Five actors who brought the unstoppable *Friday the 13th* killer to life (or unlife, depending on how far into the series they appeared) gathered with two of the series' directors to discuss their experiences as one of the most feared personalities of the 1980's.

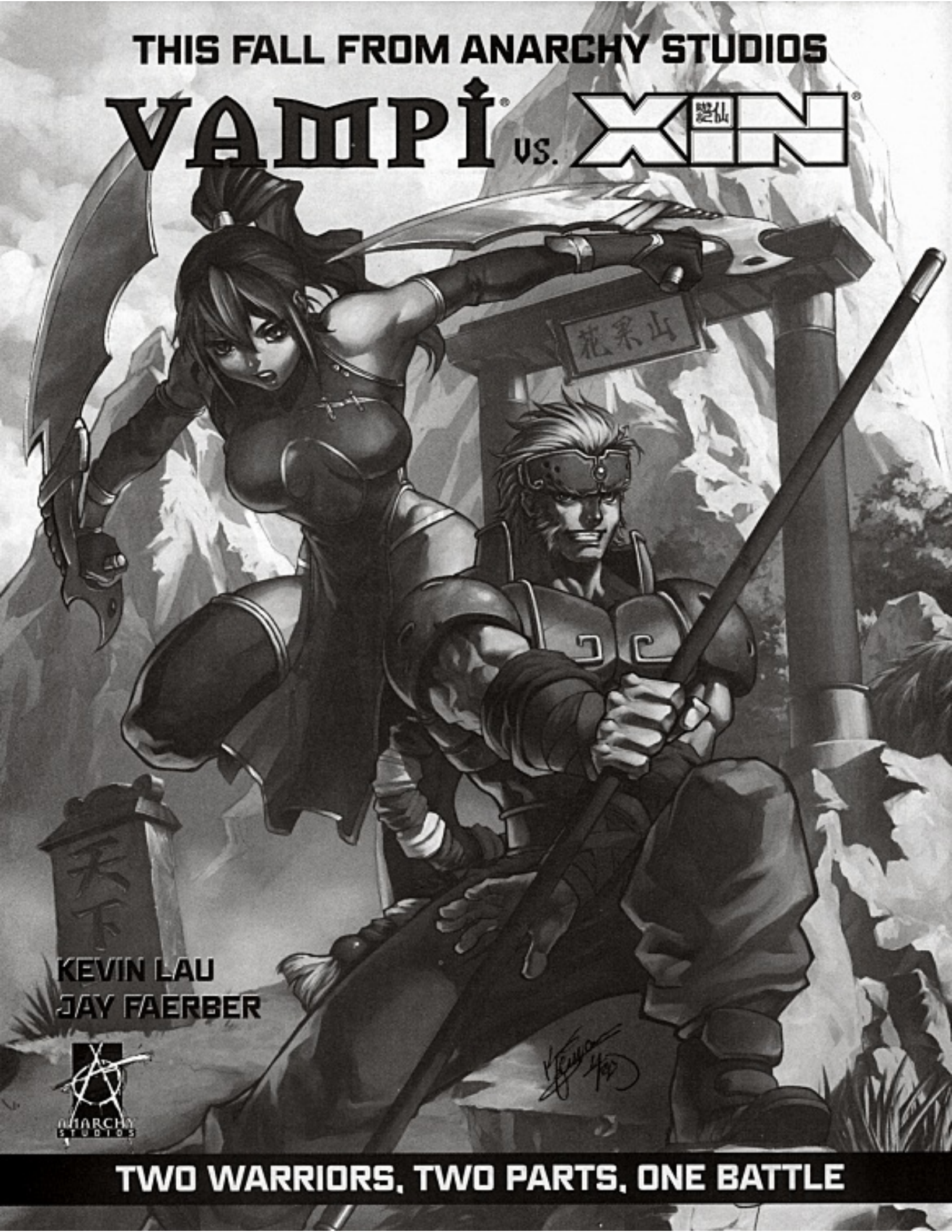
Richard Brooker, the first to don the hockey mask, recalls director Steve Miner's instruction for *Part 3*: "He basically came up to me and said, 'Don't ever ask me what your motivation is. You have no motivation. You just go out there and hack them all to death.'"

Other Jasons present were first Jason, Ari Lehman (*Friday the 13th*), who at the age of 13 mistakenly thought he was auditioning for Kevin Bacon's part and got excited about the scene where he would sneak off with a girl; Warrington Gillette (Part 2), the first actor to play the adult Jason, and C.J. Graham (*Part 6: Jason Lives*), the first undead Jason.

Greatest fan reaction came when attention turned to Kane Hodder, whose four movies, *Part 7: The New Blood* thru *Jason X*, make him the only actor to play Jason more than once. When asked about his feelings on being replaced for *Freddy vs. Jason*, Hodder reiterated his displeasure on the casting and expressed his interest in putting the mask back on.

Moderator Peter Bracke (*DVD File*) has authored a retrospective of the Crystal Lake murders. Add to that a DVD boxed set of the first eight flicks and talks of a second *Freddy vs. Jason*, die-hard Jason fans should be in no short supply of *Friday the 13th* mayhem. —TP

Jasons Throughout Time


THIS FALL FROM ANARCHY STUDIOS
VAMPI vs. XIN
花果山
KEVIN LAU
JAY FAERBER
ANARCHY STUDIOS
TWO WARRIORS, TWO PARTS, ONE BATTLE

THEY HAD PROMISED THEY WERE GOING TO "FEED ME."
WHEN THEY HELD ME DOWN UNDER THE KNIFE, I REALIZED THAT I HAD MISUNDERSTOOD.
THEN SHE SHOWED UP. SHE WAS POWERFUL, AND BEAUTIFUL. I'D NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE HER.
VAMPIRELLA IN
THE ROBIN SYNDROME
JIM CATAPANO story
JOYCE CHIN art
MIKE CONLEY lettering
SHE DESTROYED BOTH OF THEM, BUT SHE WAS A VAMPIRE TOO, I COULD TELL. DID SHE WANT ME FOR HERSELF?
I HATE FEEDING RITUALS. SO PRETENTIOUS.
YOU-- YOU SAVED MY... WOW, YOU'RE AMAZING.

YOU DON'T LOOK HOMELESS TO ME.
THANKS KID. NOW GO HOME.
NAME'S JONATHAN. AND I DON'T HAVE ONE.
I LIVE IN AN FOSTER CARE. THAT'S NOT A HOME. WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
YOU KNOW, WHEREVER THERE'S DANGER OR INJUSTICE. OR I MIGHT JUST GET A DRINK.
CAN I COME? NOTHING BETTER TO DO REALLY...
NO, YOU CAN'T. GO BACK TO WHERE YOU BELONG.
PLEASE? JUST FOR THE NIGHT. I'M SCARED MORE OF THOSE THINGS WILL COME FOR ME...
LIKE THAT ONE?
SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT YOU, KID? YOU SEEM TO ATTRACT TROUBLE.
N-NO... I DON'T THINK SO...

MUST BE A NEST AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE...
YOU KNOW, YOU STILL HAVEN'T THANKED ME FOR SAVING YOUR NECK.
CAN'T NOW... DON'T WANT TO SEEM INSINCERE...
YOU'RE WELCOME. GO AWAY.
SSSWUFF
SO YOU'RE A VAMPIRE, HUH? A GOOD ONE?
YUP, SURE.
DO YOU BURN UP IN THE SUN?
NOPE, I TAN VERY NICELY.
CAN YOU TURN INTO A BAT?
NOT FOR YOU. ANY MORE QUESTIONS BEFORE I LOSE MY MIND?
CAN I HANG WITH YOU? LIKE, BE YOUR SIDEKICK?

WHAT? NO! THE LAST THING I NEED RIGHT NOW IS SOME KID CHASING AFTER ME.
PLEASE? I'M ALMOST 13, I'M NEVER GONNA GET ADOPTED!
DON'T YOU LIKE ME?
THAT'S NOT THE POINT...
BUT... I CAN HELP YOU!
SHHH. THERE'S SOMETHING OUT HERE. COME WITH ME.
SHE HELD ME IN THE DARKNESS. AND FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, DESPITE THE DANGER, I FELT SAFE.
THERE'S A VAMPIRE AFTER US. A VERY STRONG ONE.
THERE ARE MORE?
THERE ARE ALWAYS MORE.
YOU!
YOU KILLED MY CHILDREN!

I WAS TERRIFIED. I COULDN'T MOVE...
BOTH MY GIRLS... DESTROYED. YOU MUST ANSWER...
RUN, KID!
THAT'S MY ANSWER. ANYTHING ELSE BEFORE YOU JOIN THEM?
FWACK
LEAVE HER ALONE!
JONATHAN, NO...
CRACK
NO!
YOU CARE FOR HER? GOOD...
YOU CAN WATCH HER DIE.
I... W-WON'T LET YOU HURT HER.

I WILL MAKE HER PAY TENFOLD FOR WHAT SHE HAS DONE...
CRASH!
I HAD TO DO SOMETHING.
SHE SAVED MY LIFE AND I HAD TO REPAY HER...EVEN IF SHE DIDN'T WANT ME.
I...
WON'T LET YOU...
HURT HER!
SPLAT
AIEEEEEE!

SMACK
AGH!
SNAP
I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I WAS OUT.
BUT WHEN I CAME TO, SHE WAS STANDING OVER ME... AND THE VAMPIRE WAS...
GUESS WE'RE EVEN.
AND NOW YOU'RE GOING HOME.
BUT... PLEASE...
THERE'S NO ROOM FOR YOU IN MY WORLD JONATHAN
AND BEFORE YOU ASK, I AM SORRY.

EPILOGUE
IT WAS 3 YEARS AGO, TONIGHT. I NEVER SAW HER AGAIN...
BUT I NEVER FORGOT HER.
M-HM. RIGHT. DO MOM AND DAD KNOW THEY ADOPTED A PSYCHO?
JESSICA, PLEASE DON'T SAY ANYTHING! I'VE NEVER TOLD ANYONE ABOUT THIS BEFORE...
OH, DON'T WORRY. YOUR SECRET'S SAFE. AND JONATHAN?
WHAT?
I'M GLAD YOU'RE MY BROTHER. EVEN IF YOU ARE NUTS.
I'LL TAKE THAT AS A COMPLIMENT.
END

SEE/SAW

Find the key, open the lock and Shawnee Smith is free to go. If only *Saw* were that easy.

IMAGINE FINDING YOURSELF A PRISONER WITHIN A BARBED-WIRE MAZE.

A STRANGE VOICE TELLS YOU THAT THERE IS A WAY TO GET OUT. BUT YOU MUST FIND IT QUICKLY AS A DOOR ON A TIMER WILL CLOSE AND SEAL YOU IN. FOREVER.

This is one of the many creepy and thought-provoking scenes in *Saw*, a new horror-thriller from Lions Gate Films. Made by first-time filmmaker James Wan, and written by actor Leigh Whannell, Wan's film school pal, *Saw* defies convention, taking what you know about horror movies and tossing it aside, playing on your fears and demanding you ask questions of yourself. • Sounds heavy, doesn't it? • The movie might just mess with your mind if you let it. For Wan and Whannell, they just want you to enjoy yourself.

Adam (Leigh Whannell), bloody and beaten, learns his fate in *Saw*.

CUTTING WORDS

Writer/Actor Leigh Whannell Takes a Slice Out of Feature Films

BY JASON BRIGHTMAN

Let's make something abundantly clear right from the start: *Saw* is *not* your typical genre movie. And it's not a horror flick. "It's like *Silence of the Lambs* or *Seven*," *Saw*'s co-writer and star, Leigh Whannell, confidently states before *very* quickly adding, "Not to put our film up there with those. They're sort of horrific thrillers. That's what I consider *Saw*."

It's not hard to see why some might have the impression that *Saw* is a straight up slasher-psycho-killer-popcorn-horror flick. But Whannell is adamant, "I have been surprised by people calling the film a horror film because it's not what we set out to do. Basically, when James [Wan, director] and I first had the concept in our heads and started fleshing it out, we were always thinking of it as a dark thriller. We were never like, 'Oh it's going to be a horror film.' But the more we started writing, we noticed that, being huge fans of horror films, elements of horror kept coming in."

While *Saw* may be a dark thriller, the movie is truly terrifying. Adam (Whannell) wakes to find himself chained to a wall inside a decrepit bathroom. On the opposite side is another bewildered captive, Dr. Lawrence Gordon (Cary Elwes). Between them lies a dead man in a pool of his own blood, holding a .38 in his hand. Neither knows why he's been abducted; instructions left on a micro-cassette order Dr. Gordon to kill Adam within eight hours. If he fails to do so, then both men will die, and Dr. Gordon's wife, Alison (Monica Potter), and his daughter will be killed. Recalling a recent murder investigation by a police detective named Tapp (Danny Glover), Dr. Gordon realizes he and Adam are the next victims of a psychopathic genius known only as "Jigsaw." With just a few hours left to spare, they must unravel the elaborate puzzle of their fate in the midst of mounting terror. The killer has provided them with only a few clues and two handsaws just strong enough to cut through flesh and bone but not the chains that hold them.

Saw is also *not* a model serial killer film. Jigsaw, dubbed that for his macabre calling card, doesn't go around mutilating people. "He's more like a psychopathic hobbyist," Whannell offers. "He actually wants his victims to live." In a twisted way, Jigsaw is trying to help his morally wayward victims realize important life lessons. "This is a guy who doesn't believe human beings can appreciate life until they've stared death in the face.

"Jigsaw is *very* disappointed if they die," Whannell observes. "*Extremely* disappointed. He doesn't take pleasure from watching people die. He takes pleasure from watching people go through a traumatic process and come out the other end alive. He's about hope not fear. He's interested in the results of his victim's journey; he can only see that if they live."

Even the title, *Saw*, isn't what it appears to be. "The first time I read it to James, he

thought it sounded like a straight-to-video slasher film. That's the first thing that pops into your head when you hear the title," Whannell admits. And while there are literal saws in the movie (used to chilling effect) and it is an obvious reference to Jigsaw's name, the real meaning lies just below the surface of what you expect. The title more deeply applies to Jigsaw's need to watch his victims. In fact, everyone is watching everyone else in *Saw*. The audience is watching the characters, the characters are watching each other and all the while Jigsaw is voyeuristically following his victims hoping they can see it to the complete end— their living. Which brings us back to the audience watching Jigsaw watching the victims and on and on. "Yeah. Yeah!" Whannell affirms. "*Saw* is about seeing things. Or not seeing things that are right in front of you. James and I have been joking that the sequel will be called *Saw II, Seen*."

Saw isn't about the detectives trying to solve the Jigsaw murders. It's about the victims and the movie unfolds from their unique perspective. *Imagine Silence of the Lambs*, but instead of following Jodi Foster's character through the movie, the camera and the story stayed with the girl down the well. You got brief flashes of her screaming her head off, but there are all these other ranges of emotions that a victim goes through and that's what moves the plot of *Saw* along. "Police are useful characters," confesses Whannell, "for running and ducking and diving, amping up the stakes. But *Saw* looks more like a police thriller than it is." Police help move the story along. After all you can't have car chases with two people chained to the wall of a bathroom, but *Saw* "was always a film about the victims."

The unique point-of-view came from the original premises developed from the most pure and basic of all motivations, money. Or in the case of Wan and Whannell, the lack of money. This major motion picture started with an unofficial partnership between two young Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology film students to one day make a movie together. They quickly realized making feature films was hard and required *lots* of cash, something neither had. After a long tortuous process of trying to figure out how they could finance the film, they arrived at the inevitable conclusion of paying for it themselves. "To do that we were going to have to make it really cheap," Whannell recounts. "This meant the film should really just be two actors in one room." That simple guideline gave birth to *Saw*. But not right away. "It was months and months," he laments, "trying to think of something interesting and good because it's *just* two actors in one room. We couldn't come up with something interesting enough to keep people engaged for 90 minutes to two hours." Everything they came up with seemed like it was happening on the stage and neither had any interest in theater. With Whannell at the end of his rope, Wan called and said, "I've been thinking about this idea, where a guy has to saw off his foot or he'll die." A movie was born. "It was the first time we'd come up with something that fit in with our budget guidelines and could be interesting," Whannell proclaims happily.

Dr. Gordon (Cary Elwes) reaches out for one last hope.

Wan and Whannell were all ready to go out and shoot the movie *Pi* style, you know, really guerrilla, 16 millimeter, 30 thousand dollars. They knew if they could somehow raise 15 grand each they could go out and make it. But then Whannell started writing. And writing and writing. "The whole thing just kept getting bigger. When I first started it, the whole film was going to be the scene in the bathroom with these two guys; that was the point. But I found when I started writing it more and more scenes just kept coming." Whannell wouldn't let his partner see the first draft and due to a full-time job and a full-time girlfriend it was nearly a year before it was completed. And it was very different than what the two had talked about, as Whannell readily admits. "I didn't have the guts to tell him it was now a *much* bigger film. He got it when he was on a plane and when he landed, he called and said, 'Hmmm, it's bigger than we planned... but I like it!'"

Writing *Saw* drew on a lot of dark emotions and primal terrors we all share, but Whannell couldn't count on those feelings to help him out with his acting duties. "I'm playing this character who's going through hell, but in my real life things are going well," Whannell relates. "Here I was achieving my life's dream basically. Yet at the same time I had to go to these *places*... It was really hard to find anything depressing to focus on." *Saw*'s extremely short shooting schedule didn't give him a lot of time to ad lib either. "When you're on set you're at the mercy of time. The director's the boss and yelling 'Cut!' while there's me in the back ground going, 'If we... could... just... do... one... more... take...,'" he drags it out, emphasizing his need.

Between writing the lines and saying them, Whannell admits that writing them is more comfortable, "I feel like as a writer, I'm in infinite control. I can write a line and in the back of my mind I know that in an hour from now I can change that." But saying the lines is far more exciting for this up-and-coming actor. "It's almost like sky diving versus hiking. You go hiking through the forest, it's pretty fun and it's pretty safe. Skydiving isn't as safe, and you've got a lot more adrenaline pumping through your veins and it's a lot more fun."

SAW "WAS ALWAYS A FILM ABOUT THE VICTIMS."

Leigh Whannell and his friend and working partner, Wan, are poised for big things. Following their work on their own movie, Universal tapped them for their next gig, a more traditional horror film presently titled *Shhhh*. For the time being, though, the writer/actor is taking it one small success at a time. Opening this fall in the U.S. and Australia, *Saw* hits screens in Japan soon after. "I was in Japan not long ago," Whannell says, smiling at the thought, "and I saw the movie *Audition*. The first hour and a half is a romantic melodrama and then the last 20 minutes turn into the most horrifying thing you've ever seen in your life! Funny enough it involves someone getting their foot cut off. I was watching it thinking, 'Man, the Japanese are going to love *Saw*.'"

VISCERAL VISION

Director James Wan Takes a Look and Puts the Pieces of *Saw* Together

BY MAUREEN MCTIGUE

As the movie *Saw* unfolds, the audience will find itself in the uncomfortable position of questioning their own lives. And for director James Wan, that's exactly what he wants.

"I went into it not wanting to make a horror film that you throw away, we wanted to touch on themes that are, you know, kind of crucial to the world we live in today, with a lot of that shit that's going on," he explains. "So, hopefully, people walk away from the film shattered by the story but at the same time, thinking about their own lives. If they even think about that for two seconds then we've achieved what we set out to do which is to let people have a good time, have fun, for the jolt the film could potentially give you and make you think about the theme of the film."

Part of that theme is the question, "How far would you go to save your own life?" Wan laughs hard at the thought. "Believe me, I wouldn't know how to answer that question! I just make the film and it's up to you guys to decide however you want. It's too hard."

Saw shook up attendees at the Sundance Film Festival this past winter. The dynamic duo who made it, Wan and co-writer/star Leigh Whannell, are Australian film school friends who "hit it off and we realized that we had very similar tastes and interests in culture and in pretty much everything. *Saw* is really the first project we've worked on together that got us anywhere," he laughs. "We've worked on a lot of different little things, but this is the first one that got off the ground.

"Leigh and I came up with the story. Well, actually," Wan admits, "I came up with the initial premise, pitched it to Leigh, and he loved it, which is very rare for him to like any of my stuff," he laughs. "We spent

James Wan at work, with Shawnee Smith, and Monica Potter

Detective Tapp (Danny Glover) uncovers pieces to Jigsaw's vicious puzzle

"THE AUDIENCE FEELS LIKE THEY COULD BE UNDER ATTACK AT ANY MOMENT."

months and months trying to come up with something really good, 'cause we knew that if we were going to make an indy film, we didn't want to do something that someone's seen before.

"We spent a long time on the idea and Leigh pretty much spent over one-and-a-half years writing the script. In the meantime, I started to have the film grow in my head. By the time I got onto set, even though it was only 18 days, the whole film was already in my head, all I had to do was stick to the blueprint."

Hold everything! Eighteen days? An 18-day shooting schedule? That sounds like a horror film on its own!

"Oh, yes," he sighs. "It was crazy! I guess the 18 days does give you an indication of how low-budget the film is," he laughs, "but yeah, it was crazy. And myself, having never made a film before, it was pretty outrageous. My vision for the film was pretty big so it did get out there, pretty scary even."

Not so scary is the cast. Considering their newbie status as filmmakers and the short shooting schedule, Wan and Whannell pulled in some big stars. Wan laughs at the idea that this wasn't just making a movie at home.

"Really? Truthfully, that's what it felt like, like I was shooting one of my student films with my friends. The only big difference is instead of getting my friends to star in it, I got Danny Glover playing a cop and Cary Elwes in it."

Glover (*Lethal Weapon*) and Elwes (*Shadow of the Vampire*) lead off the solid cast, consisting of Monica Potter (*Along Came a Spider*), Shawnee Smith (*Becker*) and others, including Whannell.

But hooking up with such recognizable stars must have been quite the interesting experience.

"It was good, it was really *cool*," Wan says. "Danny was a really nice guy; he's a big fella," he laughs, "and can be a bit intimidating [due to his size]. He's like this really nice uncle that you would have. That's what Danny was like. And Cary, aw, Cary was just tops. The epitome of the English gentlemen-type, really good guy. He made it really comfortable for me and Leigh on the set."

Horror films are everywhere. For Wan, it made perfectly good sense for the team to go down that path. "Well, we're huge fans of horror films, I guess it was just natural for us to want to pursue a film in that genre, plus the idea we came up with really lends itself to that genre so we pushed it and that was what came out of it."

Yet that wasn't exactly the initial plan.

"It's really funny because Leigh and I went into it thinking it was a hard-core thriller. It's funny but people who have seen it have said it's *really* scary. Lions Gate saw it and thought it's a thriller, but it's told from a horror film angle, so I think that's what made them go, 'OK, I think we should try and sell this as a horror film.'

"It's psychological, it's a thriller, and it's got horror elements in it. It's got everything in it. It's got a kitchen sink in it as well if you look carefully! Well, actually, it's a bathroom sink, but it's a sink nonetheless!" Wan laughs.

Jigsaw, the twisted "serial killer" behind this and other extravagant deathly puzzles, is only a villain if you look at the movie in a traditional way. *Saw* is *not* traditional. The serial killer in the movie, isn't. "It's not really a movie about a serial killer because the killer in my movie doesn't kill anyone himself," Wan says. "The killer actually puts people in these situations where they have to try and survive. He doesn't kill anyone outright so he's a very unique killer as he doesn't kill anyone."

And while many people have been making the comparison to *Se7en*, Wan needs to insist it isn't. Sure, there's a unique killer in it, and cops in pursuit, but "I don't want people to go out to this film thinking it's this $40 million film, which it's not. It's just a low budget horror movie that does what it has to do to get your attention, which is the kind of horror films that most people want to watch. Most people think of the studio-type horror films as sort of safe, and *Saw* isn't safe for the audience. Which is part of the thing Leigh and I tried to do: for your stuff to stand out, you have to do something that really grabs the audience and one of them is to have the film not be safe for them. The audience feels like they could be under attack at any moment."

Still not sold on this one? Well, there's always the next one: *Shhh*, for Universal.

"All my films should start with an S — well all the ones we write anyway, yeah," Wan jokes. "It's more straight-forward. Where *Saw* is a complicated thriller told in a non-linear way, *Shhh* is a much more straight-forward, it's an old-fashioned ghost story."

The inspiration for *Saw* is very specific for Wan. "If you love Dario Argento movies, then you'll dig *Saw*. The influences I had on *Saw* were people like Dario Argento; I'm a big fan of David Lynch so there's a lot of Lynchian things I was channeling and I'm a big fan of Bob Clark's *Black Christmas*, so some of these elements end up in the film."

Basically it all comes down to this for the young director: "At the end of the day, it is just meant to be entertaining, I set out to make an entertaining horror film. Having not done any of this before, I guess my vision was a lot more expensive, but jeez, you know, I shouldn't really complain. I got that break everyone is looking for and I'm not complaining."

WRITER, ILLUSTRATOR and TV IMPRESARIO: HOWARD CHAYKIN EXPOSES the REALITIES OF FICTION With STYLE

BY PATRICK KELLER

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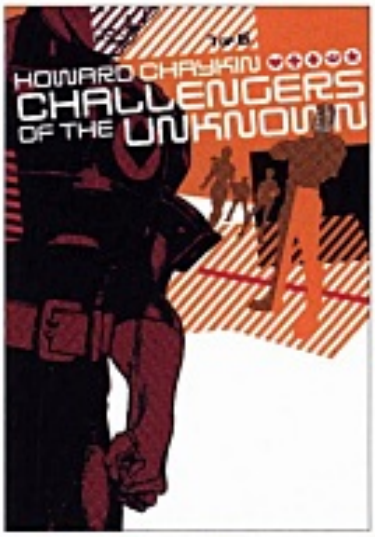


City of Tomorrow follows *Challengers* in Chaykin's schedule

CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN © 2004 DC COMICS. CITY OF TOMORROW © HOWARD CHAYKIN, INC. PHOTO BY JEFF PARKER, COURTESY STEVE LIEBER

CHALLENGE

Groucho Marx once said, "I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member." But if Groucho had to choose between *Fight Club* or *Bite Club*, which do you think he (or any sane person) would pick? Let's see: sweaty, half-naked men beating the living hell out of one another in dingy basements, or oversexed vampire mobsters living it up in sun-soaked Miami?

Exactly.

As it happens, the same goes for Howard Chaykin, legendary comics writer/artist of such seminal works as *American Flagg!*, *Black Kiss*, *Blackhawk* and, more recently, *Bite Club*, the 6-issue miniseries for DC Comics' Vertigo imprint, starring the aforementioned vampire mafia. And as if that weren't enough to keep him busy, this summer saw the start of his daring reimagining of Jack Kirby's groundbreaking *Challengers of the Unknown*. It's been a busy year for a creator who spent the better part of the last two decades away from the printed page while he wrote and produced television shows like *Mutant X* and *Earth: Final Conflict*.

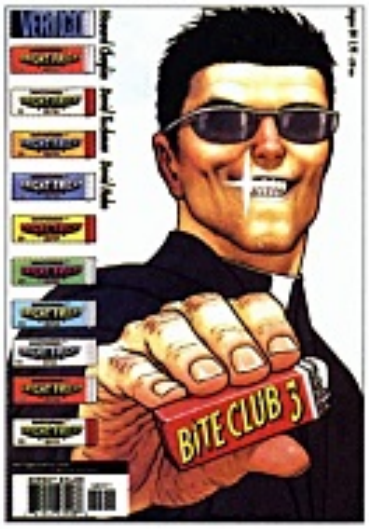
"After all those years of 80 hour work weeks," Chaykin explains, "I decided it was time to take a step back and see if the muscles I use to do comics were still operative. What I discovered was that those skills were still tight, my chops were good — and more importantly, I was emotionally happier, physically healthier and more spiritually grounded. So here I am."

Chaykin is widely acknowledged as a master of the craft, with a bibliography as impressive as it is long, a feat made more impressive by the fact that he often does nearly all the heavy lifting on his books solo: writing, pencilling, inking. It can be a daunting task for prospective collaborators to work alongside such an accomplished trailblazer. "I often find it difficult to get other artists to work as hard as I do, so I have to be a bit careful in what I ask of talent. My scripts are anally detailed — including, to the dismay of some artists, indication of panel size and scale." This is something *Bite Club* artist David Hahn, who was hand-selected by Chaykin out of dozens of other potential artists for the project, can personally attest to. "Vertigo editor Shelly Bond and I had been trying to work together on a project for some time," Hahn says. "When *Bite Club* came along and Howard asked if I was available, well, everything just fell into place.

"So far," Hahn admits, "the only difference between working with Howard and working with other writers is people always ask me 'What's it like working with Howard Chaykin?' Answer: Fab."

The book itself takes vampires about as far away from Dracula's archetypal Transylvania as one can get. In *Bite Club*, vampires are just another minority in society, albeit one with unusual abilities and a social mystique not far removed from, say, Paris Hilton. Here, vampirism is less a soul-destroying burden and more a cool accessory, like an Armani suit or Manolo Blahniks. "We simply

Mighty Love, a twisted superhero romance, preceeded Chaykin's *Bite Club* activities.



BITE CLUB © 2004 HOWARD CHAYKIN, INC., DAVID TISCHMAN AND DC COMICS; MIGHTY LOVE © HOWARD CHAYKIN, INC

American Flagg! **rises again this November.**
First Contact **(top)**
Mutant X **(bottom)**

MARVEL IMAGE © MARVEL COMICS, INC.

"Leaping off the cliff — that the audience will follow me for the ride."

wanted to step away from the legends and religio-spiritual aspects of vampirism," Chaykin says. "Normalize it, if you will. Vampires are the perfect vessel for metaphoric stories — from AIDS, to addiction, et cetera. David and I were very high on using the concept as a metaphor for the immigrant experience."

The mob angle came naturally, Chaykin says. "David and I are both steeped in crime and organized crime fiction, from *The Godfather*, to *Wiseguys*, to *The Sopranos*."

One trademark in nearly all of Chaykin's work is attention to sexual appetites of all kinds. "I'm a bit of a voyeur, and a bit adventurous, too," he says by way of explanation.

The Chaykin/Tischman partnership, which has brought the comics world everything from *Angel and the Ape* to *The Secret Society of Superheroes*, *American Century* to *Son of Superman*, has come to an end with *Bite Club*, after a long, productive run together that dates back to the early days of Chaykin's time in Hollywood. "We met when he was an executive, and doing comics together simply evolved as our friendship grew. We tend to have different approaches to similar ideas, which made for a nice match, but I will say we're no longer working together, having gone on to other projects."

Among the first projects on the newly solo Chaykin's plate is the relaunch of *Challengers*, a comic that has allowed him to return to his roots, in more ways than one. "I'd wanted to be a comics artist since I was four years old," he reminisces, "when a slightly older cousin gave me a crate filled with comics. I loved everything about them — the look, the feel, the smell — and ultimately, I taught myself to read, parsing out the words.

"I got my actual start in the field as an assistant to four giants — Gil Kane, Wallace Wood, Gray Morrow and Neal Adams — first as gofer, then filling in blacks, then ghost penciling." From there, he made the leap to full-fledged creator in his own right on titles like *Ironwolf* and *Cody Starbuck* (the latter appearing in *Heavy Metal* magazine), before being chosen to draw the comics adaptation for *Star Wars*. For many readers, however, Chaykin truly came into his own with the tour-de-force that was *American Flagg!*, an eerily prescient series that foretold everything from reality television to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resultant chaos in the territories that it dominated.

And, as it happens, much of the groundwork for Chaykin's *Challengers* series was laid in the pages of *Flagg*. "The television elements in *Challengers of the Unknown* derive from *Flagg!*" (For those who may have missed *Flagg* the first time around, or perhaps misplaced their issues long ago, Chaykin helpfully points out, they will be reprinted soon by Dynamic Forces in "a new deluxe edition that will be out in November 2004 — check it out.") As in *Flagg!*, the media has an oppressive presence that goes well beyond merely reporting and into the realm of outright manipulation. Readers should have no trouble connecting KnowNowNet News channel in *Challengers* to its real life counterpart. And Chaykin is fine with this... to a point. "It's certainly satirical — but when I consider the state of the union these days, it's far from an exaggeration. I make no secret of my political leanings, but at the same time, I am not necessarily my characters. The audience frequently and mistakenly makes that stretch."

Still, he cautions, the book's message is very much one he supports: "Don't believe what you hear or see — and get to know who your friends and enemies are."

There is a lot going on in Chaykin's *Challengers*. The book opens with a horrific botched assassination attempt, an event broadcast again and again by smirking anchors ("I thought starting the book with a woman having her head turned into red mist was hitting the ground running," Chaykin says with aplomb.) and turned into political capital before the body is even cold. Into this quagmire come our protagonists: A junkie, an extreme athlete, a hip-hop recording artist, an industrial saboteur and a muckraker. Before they can get their bearings, Long Beach, California is turned into a smoking crater. Somehow, the five of them survive and a mystery is afoot.

Sharp readers will recall the connection to the original iteration of the *Challengers*, who survived a plane crash together and realized they were living on borrowed time. But where the original found the team turning to exploration and adventure, Chaykin instead focuses on political intrigue, conspiracies and manipulation. "I was asked by Dan DiDio to take a radical whack at the material," he reveals. "I felt that to a profound extent, much of the original series had been obviated by *The X-Files*, so I felt it was imperative to find a new agenda and a new approach." Taking a "new approach" with a beloved (albeit neglected) property can be risky, but Chaykin saw it as, pardon the pun, a challenge. "I'm always concerned about [doing a radical revamp], but it's never stopped me from leaping off the cliff — with the hope that the audience will follow me for the ride."

And besides, nothing in his book attempts to invalidate those that have gone before. "As you read the series, you'll note that one doesn't eliminate the other, and that they can exist side-by-side."

Chaykin has high hopes for the book. "*The Challengers of the Unknown* might very likely go on as a monthly," he says. Not that he'll want for things, having already produced one book, *Mighty Love*, for DC prior to the *Challengers* work. "Once *Challengers* is finished, I'll start *City of Tomorrow*, a creator-owned science fiction action/adventure for Wildstorm, an issue of *Solo* for [DC's] Mark Chiarello, as well as a couple of projects I can't go into."

Chaykin is open to the idea of more *Bite Club*, but he's not waiting to work with Hahn again. "We're talking about other projects, and as I write, he's about to start the artwork on a story for *The Escapist* at Dark Horse."

He also has a dream project lurking. "I've got a personal book, *Midnight of the Soul*, a period crime book that I'll do someday."

With any luck, we will get to see that dream come true soon, along with much, much more.

MUTANT X, EARTH FINAL CONFLICT © RESPECTIVE OWNERS.

THE BIG FAT EASY

THINK ALL NEW ORLEANS VAMPIRES ARE ROCK STARS? ANDREW FOX SAYS THINK AGAIN!

BY MAUREEN McTIGUE

Jules Duchon is a vampire in New Orleans. That in and of itself elicit thoughts of leather and lace, historic mansions and the high, rich lifestyle a vampire in the Big Easy lives.

But Jules Duchon does not run with the Lestat crew by any means. Jules is a cabdriver, who loves his big Cadillac, enjoys a good cup of coffee, doesn't like many of the other vampires in town — save for his beloved Maureen, a true vamp in the guise of a stripper of size — and weighs in somewhere in the vicinity of 450 pounds. Jules doesn't know how to take advantage of being a vampire: he knows the traditions, he knows what he's supposed to do, but even his transformations are portly.

"The whole reason when Jules in *Fat White Vampire Blues*, is transforming into his other forms, the bat to the wolf, the reason those forms are also incredibly obese and clumsy is that's how Jules saw himself," author Andrew Fox explains. "The reason that he was coming down with what he figured were the symptoms of diabetes, arthritis, slipped disc and this that and the other thing, was because for years, he'd been reading and watching stories on TV that this is what's going to happen to morbidly obese people and he just accepted that; that's how his subconscious worked."

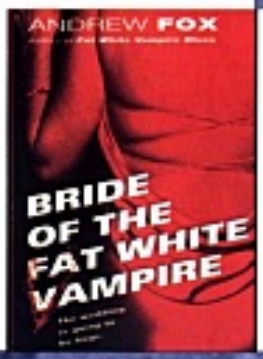
Fox, who by day works for the Louisiana Office of Public Health and is primarily concerned with matters of nutrition and malnutrition, took his knowledge and merged it with New Orleans' tendency to be a "truth is stranger than fiction" town.

"I started thinking if there really were vampires in New Orleans and they spent 100 or 150 years or more sucking the blood of people who eat the New Orleans diet, this incredibly rich, cream laden, deep fried, incredibly high calorie food, wouldn't these vampires be sucking down over the years gallons of cholesterol, of fatty lipids and over time would really become people of size."

Fox is having fun. And so should the readers. Jules' antics are humorous, and sometimes make one cringe. As he flops and frets his way from victim to victim, from car to coffin, Jules Duchon is a laughing stock. Both Maureen, and the vampire Jules' turned, Doodlebug, feel sorry for him and try to help him — Maureen through love, Doodlebug through Zen training — but Jules is not one for pity. There's nothing but pity, though, when Malice X and his vamps zero in on Jules and his feeding habits, and Fox brings forth some of New Orleans, a writer's town to be sure, to his tale.

"I have a vampire who was born in 1895," Fox explains, "and just think about the changes he would have seen in the 100 years he'd be around. There's a lot more harmony than you might expect but there's also a heck of a lot of friction. So, just as there is a rising black middle class in the city, what if there were a rising black *vampire* class and how would they react to this sort of left-over, white, working class vampire in their midst? That's how I came up with the notion of Malice X being an antagonist for Jules. I figured that way I could play it in a satirical way; sort of explore the racial, ethnic and class tension in the city. That's also why I included the High Krewe of Vlad Tepes. We really have three main socio-economic groups in the city and relationships between these groups are quite complicated and interesting, so I wanted to build myself a little vampire subculture and comment and satirize actual community relations."

"You can't keep a good vampire down, you can't even keep a bad vampire down."



The untraditional nature of Fox's vampires partly stems from his admiration of certain movies. "I never found the glamorous vampires to be interesting characters for me to read about or to watch. The vampires that I preferred were much more the tragic haunted vampires. A couple of my favorites are Lon Chaney, Jr's Son of Dracula and William Marshall, the actor who portrayed Blacula."

Fox knows his stuff. He's a long-time fan of the old classics like *King Kong* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, of *Tomb of Dracula*, Ray Bradbury, *The Curse of Dr. Lau*, and of just about every science fiction writer of the last 50 years. He knows all the conventions and plays with them like Tinker Toys, building what he wants. *In Bride of the Fat White Vampire*, he toys with something that always bugged him. "In terms of why so many characters were killed off in the first book coming back in the second, that's just a little commentary on *all* the vampire movies I watched as a kid," he explains. "*How* many different ways did you see Dracula done in at the end of the movie, and the next week, they would find a way to bring him back! Dracula *always* came back, no matter what the heck happened to him at the end of the previous movie. So that's my sense of vampires: You can't keep a good vampire down, you can't even keep a bad vampire down, they always come back."

More *Fat White Vampire* stories are percolating in Fox's brain. "If there's going to be a demand, I have a third Jules book, *Ghost of the Fat White Vampire*, totally plotted out. If I had to describe it in one line, it would have to be 'Jules' wild, crazy time travel adventure.'"

Beyond the possible continuing series, Fox has a science fiction black comedy under consideration. Called *Calorie 3501*, the book predicts a future where the government bans high calorie food due to escalating health costs pushing them to the brink of bankruptcy. Good Humor men, taking the place of Ray Bradbury's firemen in this *Fahrenheit 451* homage, go through towns confiscating and burning banned food. "Of course, the books' big question is 'Can Elvis Save the World 64 years after he died?'"

Andrew Fox does love this gig. He enjoys going to science fiction and comic book conventions, talking with the fans and other professionals. He didn't set out to write vampire novels, he acknowledges that falling in love with New Orleans and the abundance of vampire wannabes the city attracted over the years has as much to do with the movies he watched over and over. "Vampires made a big impression on me," he says of subject matter but concedes, "New Orleans is a fabulous place for a writer because all you have to do is open up the daily paper, turn on the evening news, and practically almost any day of the year, you'll have enough material for a book or at least a darned good short story," he laughs. "Things go on here that probably don't go on anywhere else in the United States."

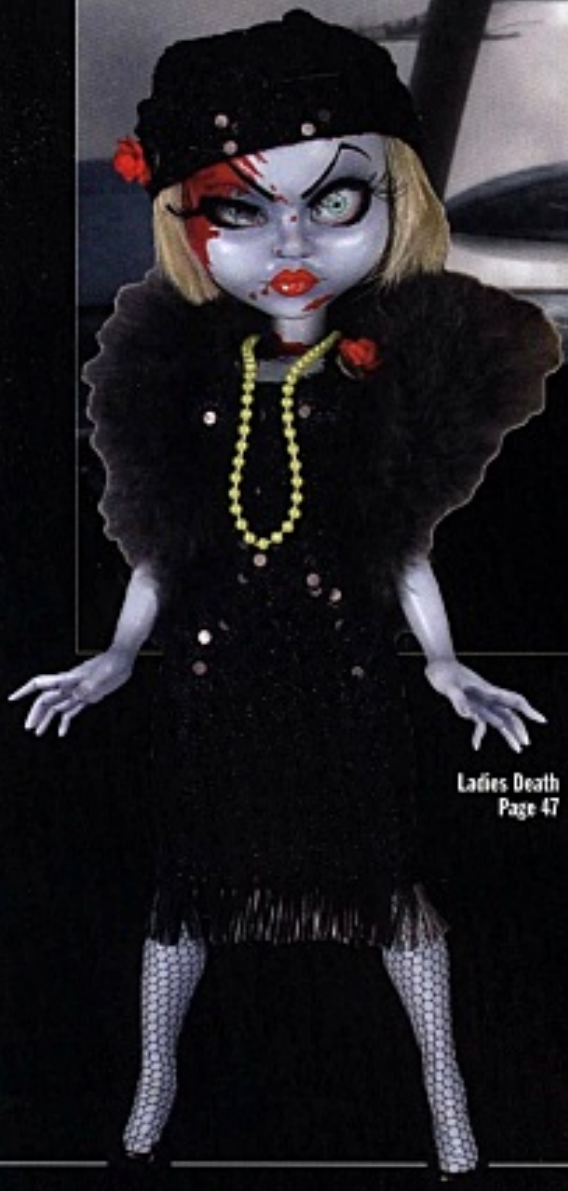
FOX PHOTO: NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY; BOOKS: RANDOM HOUSE

NEW BLOOD

WHATEVER GETS YOU THROUGH THE NIGHT

Let them bleed! Welcome to NEW BLOOD where we want you to find your type, sit back and enjoy the best, the brightest and even the questionable in comics, books, movies, toys and chicks. They say there's something for everyone; here's the place to find it.

Angelina Jolie in Sky Captain. Page 30



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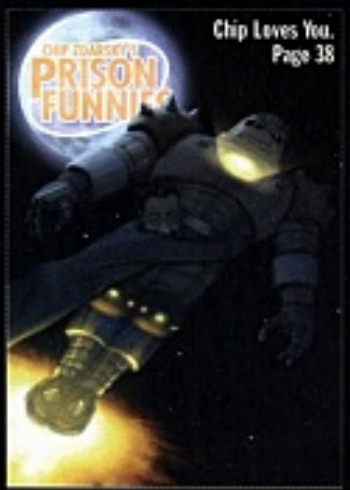

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TAKE TO THE SKIES

FOR 'SKY CAPTAIN,' IT'S GIANT ROBOTS, RAYGUNS & STYLE

MOVIE REVIEW

SKY CAPTAIN AND THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

Writer/Director: Kerry Conran
Paramount Pictures

Oh my god! Are those blimps?! Are they docking at the Empire State Building?!

The first time I saw the trailer for *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*, I couldn't believe what I was seeing! There was no way this could really be a movie, not with that radio-serial of a title or visuals like *that*. It looked like a live-action cartoon shot in the art deco heyday of the 1930s. Giant robots with spindly arms, airplanes that flapped their wings. To my delight the trailer was for a *real* movie! And I got to see an advance screening of the film at the 2004 San Diego Comic-Con.

The world's greatest scientists have gone missing one by one and *The Chronicle*'s intrepid reporter Polly Perkins (Gwyneth Paltrow) is on the case. No assignment is too daunting for Polly and she thrives on adventure, which is good because no sooner does the movie start, then *giant robots begin attacking the city!* Polly calls in the daring Sky Captain (Jude Law) to save the day with his beloved Warhawk P-40 and the Flying Legion. Ahhh, then there's Captain Franky Cook (Angelina Jolie), the courageous leather clad leader of an all-women amphibious assault force, with an eye patch! (I've had dreams like that!) What follows is the most amazingly stylized pulp fiction romp ever committed to film. Think retro-futuristic *Raiders of the Lost Ark* with the visual style of the 1939 World's Fair in New York City.

Risking their lives, Sky Captain and his companions travel to exotic places around the world trying to unravel the mystery of Totenkopf. Whoever said, "Getting there is half the fun," only got *Sky Captain* half right. The adventure from A to B in this seemingly pedestrian plot is the fun. Like any great ride, it crashes your expectations against your

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wildest imagination with surprisingly nimble twists and turns that leave you breathless, watching wide-eyed and loving every minute. Suddenly you're five years old again playing with toys where planes can swim and ships can fly and heroes always look good. First time screenwriter, director and visionary Kerry Conran spent four years creating his own software and producing a six-minute film of his script *Sky Captain* in his garage on a Macintosh IIci. Producer Jon Avnet was so impressed with what he saw on the demo, he immediately set out spending the next four years making Conran's dream a reality. The $70 million dollar movie is shot almost entirely against a blue screen and is in effect almost one continuous special effect.

The film was made without a single set. The flesh-and-blood actors were filmed in an empty studio with only a few minor props, everything else was added by computer months later. The technique could be the most important cinematic breakthrough in years. Without the need for production designers, art directors and carpenters, millions of dollars could be cut off the costs of filming. Despite the ultra high-tech production, the movie is 100 percent retro. The overarching stylistic vision completely obscures the fact that what you're seeing is nearly all CGI. Like the 1940s animated Superman shorts by Max Fleischer, every frame in *Sky Captain* is richly textured, beautifully lit and perfectly composed.

As the film started I, honestly, got a little worried. Conran's artistic vision extended to even the editing of the film with it's quick cartoon cuts and extreme close ups. I was afraid the visuals would overwhelm everything, even my enjoyment. Then Law appeared. His on screen relationship with Paltrow *made* the movie. It, like the visuals, was unique and different. It was vital. Alive. That was it. I was hooked.

Sky Captain may have been entirely computer-generated but the story has heart. It's a funny, warm ride of a movie that keeps you guessing where it will take you next, while you gleefully sit there immersed in every spectacular turn.

And *there are giant robots with spindly arms!* I can't wait to see this movie again.

—Jason Brightman

THE VAULT

MYRIAD MANIC MAYHEM THAT MATTERS

COMICS

FISTS OF FURY

The Choices are Infinite, Grasshopper

INFINITE KUNG FU **Writer/Artist: Kagan McLeod**

Great Lakes Ninja Brotherhood www.kaganmcleod.com/infinitekungfu

Infinite kung fu
TOGETHER IN THE MARTIAL WORLD'S MOST TREACHEROUS TERRITORY, FORMER FRIENDS RACE TO RECOVER THE EMPEROR'S AGE-OLD ARMOR! WHICH WARRIOR WILL WIN?

You cannot conquer Kagan McLeod's kung fu style! Master of many techniques, McLeod will bedazzle your senses with zombies, funk and the way of the fist! In a world turned upside down, the undead walk the earth. Against this harsh backdrop, a cruel emperor scours the world for a mythical suit of armor. The only roadblock: the Disciples of the Eight Immortals, among them AWOL soldier Yang Lei Kung and outcast from a *Shaft* film Moog Joogular. They combat the Emperor's forces with fighting techniques such as Centipede Sting Punch, Shaolin Soul Switch and Fury of a 1,000 Fists.

Infinite Kung Fu has the feel of a finely crafted remix of the greatest hits from the campy zombie, kung-fu and blaxploitation films McLeod obviously loves. He blends the hooks from each genre so they play off each other creating an entirely new and exciting track. He employs different art styles too, going from a thick but fluid line to depict hard-hitting action sequences to thin brushwork for the quieter, reflective moments. The reader is surprised again and again by the results of McLeod's daring. What other surprises lay in store? The possibilities are infinite. —BA

CITY OF GLASS

Writer: Paul Auster
Adapted by David Mazzucchelli & Paul Karasik
Picador
(www.picadorusa.com)

Paul Auster's *City of Glass* is one third of his New York Trilogy, along with *Ghosts* and *The Locked Room*. It is also a newly refurbished graphic novel, adapted by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. *City of Glass* tells the story of Quinn: an author with a tragic past who pretends to be a P.I. and gets embroiled in the dark and strange philosophy of his clients and the man he is following. As in much of Auster's work, Paul Auster appears as a character, and chance and choice create a labyrinthine plot.

In graphic novel form, this labyrinth is made manifest by the deceptively simplistic black and white artwork. Though Art Spiegelman's intro claims *City* is a "nonvisual work," I found it particularly suited to graphic novel form. Layers of meaning and inexplicability are heaped on Auster's prose by the drawings. As the characters wander the New York City streets, metaphoric illustrations in the panels create a lost feeling amongst the grid plan; as the characters describe the separation of words and meaning, the art helps rebind the two.—Emily Lauer

JAMIE DELANO'S 2020 VISIONS

Writer: Jamie Delano
Artists: Various
Cyberosia Publishing
www.cyberosia.com

In 2020, people are cattle and freedom doesn't matter as much as survival. Originally published by DC/Vertigo as a 12-part limited series, Jamie Delano's bleak vision of America's future is now collected into one volume, a far better way of experiencing the story. Delano examines every facet of this new but familiar America, utilizing a variety of tools — different artists, different genres and different characters scattered around the country — to show every possible point of view.

Delano wrote *Visions* in the mid-90s from a pre-9/11 perspective. With no external threats at the time uniting a country of so many different beliefs and walks of life, he envisioned a future where America would tear itself apart from the inside out. Here cultural and political divisions infect the marrow of the country, poisoning the society's sense of decency and justice, turning the value of life upside down.

Delano's loathsome characters struggle against this world that doesn't want them. Whether they win or not is irrelevant. What matters is how Delano presents them: he renders their pain and suffering truthfully, so truthfully we pity them. And if we can feel pity for these creatures then their lives might not be so disposable after all, the only hope they have in this American Dream turned nightmare.—BA

END TIMES: TIEMPOS FINALES

Writer/Artist: Sam Hiti
La Luz Comics
www.samhiti.com

An unknowable evil plagues a sleepy town, its frightened inhabitants pray for deliverance. One makes a plea that finally works: Mario Roman is dispatched to the Five Towns and demons tremble.

So goes newcomer Sam Hiti's strange and wonderful graphic novel *End Times*. It sounds like another demon hunter story, right? In a post-Buffy world aren't we supposed to be sick of this stuff? Hiti upsets expectations

ALL PROJECTS © RESPECTIVE OWNERS

though by cranking the weirdness quotient to eleven: there's the town seemingly older than time, so familiar yet alien; children with gargantuan eyes; the bible that morphs into a gun and demons that actually look like demons, with way too many eyes, way too many limbs and way too many other things they shouldn't have.

Hiti's thick blacks and sepia tones give the town a dirty, oppressive atmosphere. His organic line makes everything from the brick of the alleyways to the ropes of the town's fragile bridges seem as if they're about to come alive. But on the demons his art style is a perfect fit, as if he was born to draw them.

While some portions of the story seem more decompressed than necessary, it's more than made up for by the opportunity to get lost in Hiti's art. One can only hope that *End Times* signals the beginning of recognition for a promising talent.—BA

MOVIES

ROMCOMZOM

i.e. Romantic Comedy with Zombies

SHAUN OF THE DEAD

Director: Edgar Wright Writers: Wright and Simon Pegg
Working Title Films/Rogue Pictures

It would be very sensible to talk about *Shaun of the Dead* in a critical way, to discuss the influence of George Romero, to highlight the in-jokes, to revel in the commentary on British romantic comedies. But where's the fun in that? We'll make it easy for you: Go see *Shaun of the Dead*. See Simon Pegg (he's Shaun) bash zombies with a cricket bat, see Nick Frost (that's Ed) play the affable sidekick and beyond-comic relief, see Kate Ashfield (Shaun's girlfriend, Liz) go from demure lass to ass-kicking zombie killer.

Director Edgar Wright brings it all together, hitting the right horror marks but playing the comedy to its fullest, something he, Pegg and Frost did so well on their British comedy *Spaced*.

It's a fun flick, full of blood and gore, and zombies, with high and low comedy, and zombies, and poignant moments and more zombies. So, aim for the head, and make sure you see *Shaun of the Dead*. —MM

BOOKS

DAVE MCKEAN: NARCOLEPSY RETROSPECTIVE

Allen Spiegel Fine Arts
www.allenspiegelfinearts.com

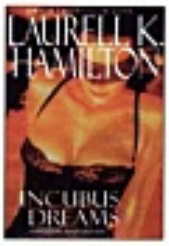
The challenge: pay homage to Dave McKean by creating a book that encompasses the vast scope of his life's work. The editors of *Narcolepsy*, the book for a McKean exhibit in Belgium, soon realized no explanations were necessary. His work speaks for itself.

The book is divided up according to medium: Paint, Photo, Film, Comics and Print. Each section has its own introductory essay gushing with praise. One says, "He seems effortlessly to fabricate dreams at once real and unreal." Another says of him that he reveals "the impossible happening in a world where the impossible has been outlawed." Fitting words, but none can truly suffice to describe McKean's work.

Somehow he's able to take some leaves, a forgotten photograph and some junk just cleaned out of a garage and turn it into something penetrating and haunting. The cumulative effect of seeing so many of his pieces at once conveys the depth of his genius and creativity. His is the stuff that has to be seen not only to be appreciated but be believed.—BA

INCUBUS DREAMS

Author: Laurell K. Hamilton
Berkley Hardcover
(penguin.com)

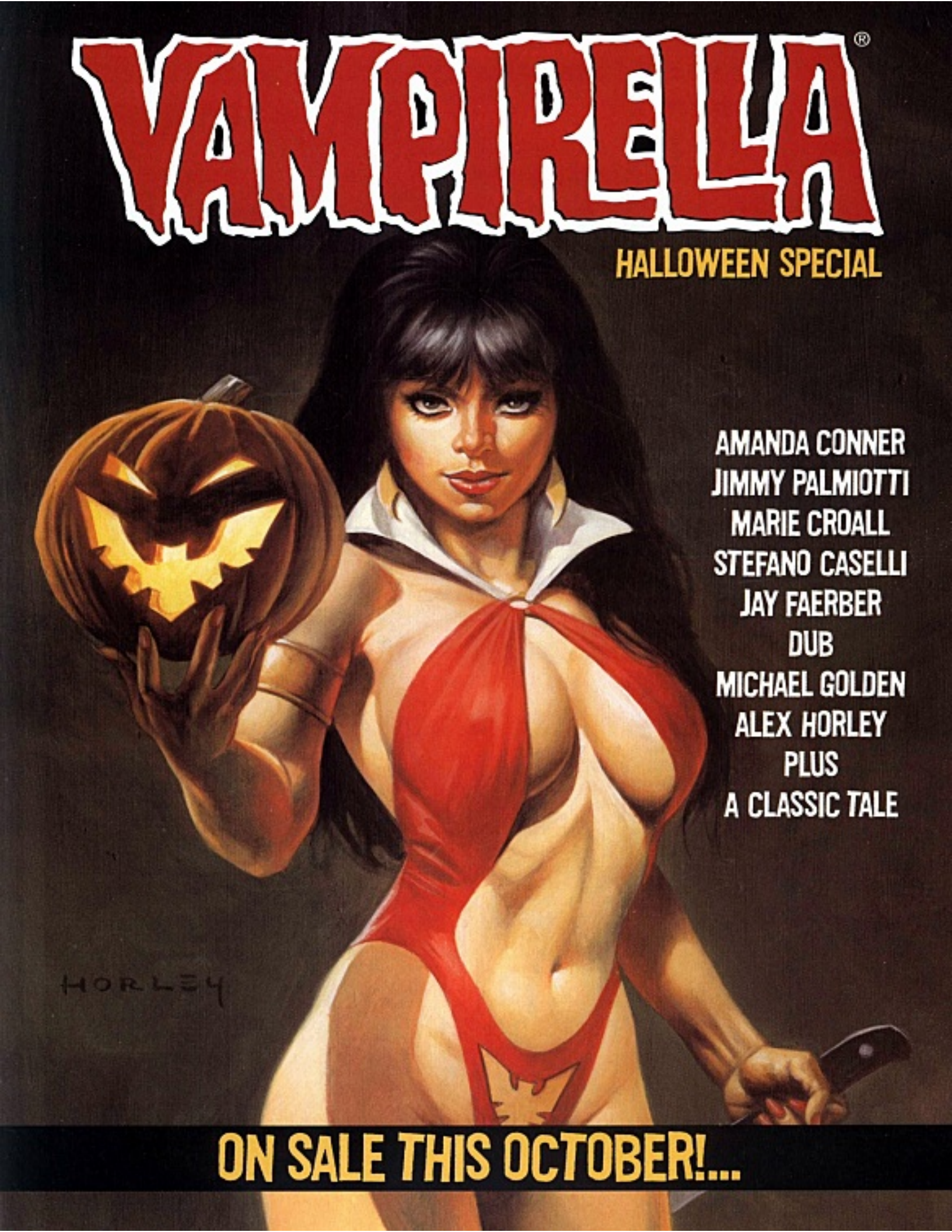


Incubus Dreams, the 12th entry in the Anita Blake series, is the most mammoth. Topping out at over 600 pages, the book gives us an Anita so far removed from the prudish, no-nonsense animator of her first appearances as to be unrecognizable now that she has the "arduer," a need to feed from lust inherited from über-vampire Jean-Claude in *Narcissus in Chains*. It's a primal hunger that can never be satisfied, only controlled, and sets the stage for an endless series of erotic encounters while Anita tries to find time to solve her latest case. Where she once eschewed romantic entanglements, she now finds herself embroiled in five and counting. At the head of the pack is the intriguing were-leopard Micah, then Jason, a wolf, and Nathanial, another leopard. Together with Jean-Claude and the long-suffering werewolf Richard, they conspire to make Anita's life a virtual zoo.

The plot concerns a vampire serial killer feasting on strippers, but it seems rather secondary to Anita's hellishly complicated and erotic personal life. There is a tremendous amount of kinky sex, some of it very violent and bordering on sadistic at times.

Struggling to deal with her vampiric and lycanthropic suitors, Anita finds her old relationships unraveling. Her changed attitude towards and immersion in the dark world she once fought against is killing her relationships with "normal" allies.

Enjoying this book depends very much on whether you prefer the Anita of old, in which case you probably left the series several books ago. However, if you have been able to stay with her all through her developments then *Incubus Dreams* will not fail to satisfy.—Jim Catapano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MARIE CROALL
STEFANO CASELLI
JAY FAERBER
DUB
MICHAEL GOLDEN
ALEX HORLEY
PLUS
A CLASSIC TALE
HORLEY
ON SALE THIS OCTOBER!...

BIG BOX OF HORROR

THIS TIME, IT'S ALL GOOD! SO SAYS ELVIRA!

You want horror? Try this on for size: "I was covered in snakes and spiders, and a rat jumped down my cleavage. I couldn't get it out! Oh, how I *love* rats!"

Lucky rat, you might say, especially when the cleavage in question belongs to the one and only Elvira. For more than two decades, the buxom hostess has thrilled audiences with her trademark wit, good looks and wardrobe ("I wish I had started out wearing a black muumuu," she quips). And now fans can bring the goddess of horror home for keeps with the release of two chilling new DVD collections packed with new material from the legendary "Mistress of the Dark": *Elvira's Horror Classics* and *Elvira's Box of Horror*.

"These are *great* movies," she insists, and she's not kidding. In the three-disc *Box of Horror*, you get zombies (the original *Night of the Living Dead*), rogue body parts (*The Brain that Wouldn't Die*), a haunted house (*House on Haunted Hill*) and even killer plants (*Little Shop of Horrors*'s Audrey II, of course). But wait! There's more! There's the creepy low-budget ghost story *Carnival of Souls*, and even Francis Ford Coppola's directorial debut, *Dementia 13*. Each film features a running commentary by Elvira. "I introduce them, break in at different spots and do a wrap up."

The legendary Vincent Price stars in the classic *House on Haunted Hill*, one of Elvira's favorite flicks.

Proving that some people have no taste, a handful of viewers of previous Elvira VHS releases complained about the hostess's comedic interruptions, "The great thing about the DVDs is that you can choose [whether] to watch your movies Elvira-ized!"

Though each viewer will likely discover their own favorite in the sets, the hostess clearly has her own preference. "I love, love, love this movie," she says of *House on Haunted Hill*, the original 1959 version, starring the master of horror himself, Vincent Price. Her devotion to Price can still be heard in her voice when she reminsces about her first encounter with him. "I saw this movie when I was in second or third grade and it gave me nightmares for a year," Elvira confesses. "My parents thought they'd have to take me to the looney bin."

Still, she continues, "I got to be a *huge* fan of Vincent Price, and I saw all his movies. I got to meet him later, and it was like working with my idol."

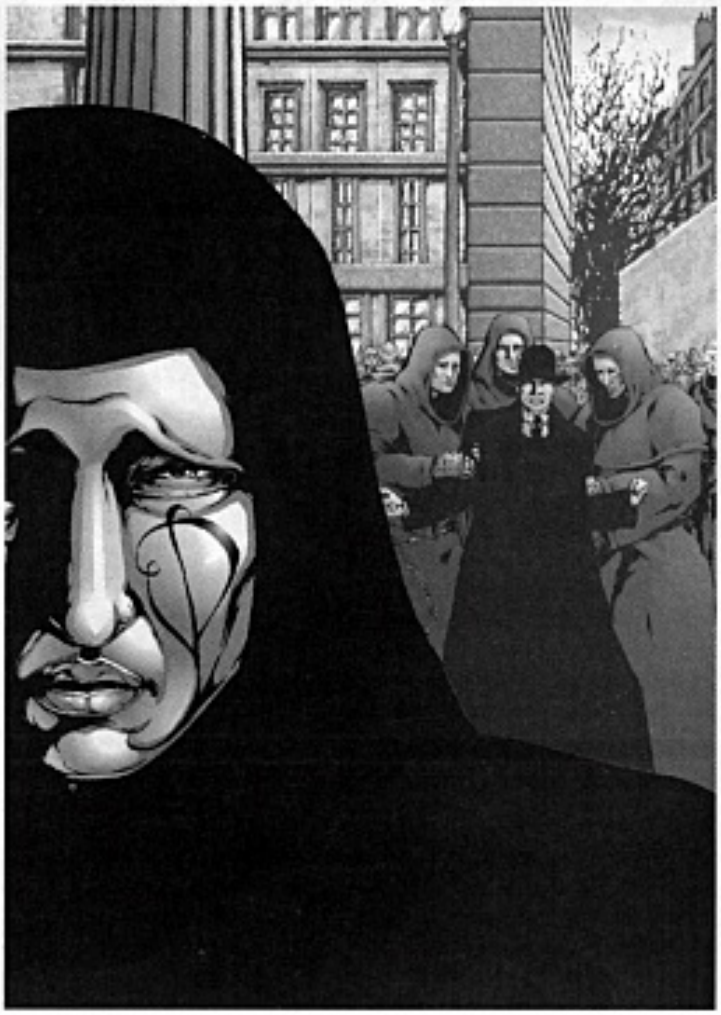
Fans looking for a bite-sized taste of Elvira have the option of picking up her *Horror Classics* DVD, which pares *Box* down to two essentials: *Haunted Hill* and *Living Dead*. Both sets will be available in stores just in time for late October celebrations, and even earlier through a TV promo. But that's not all going on for the self-described "Santa Claus of Halloween." "I'm always doing new stuff," she says, not the least of which is a special for the Animal Planet network, *The World's Creepiest Animals*, the one that resulted in the aforementioned world's luckiest rodent. "They're not real animals," Elvira says, of the show. "They're the 'animals' from horror movies from 1930 and on."

With Halloween coming up, the Mistress of the Dark's busy season is just beginning. "I get a bump every Halloween," she says, "like how Santa Claus goes away for the rest of the year." And that bump is surely what keeps Elvira's alter ego, Cassandra Peterson, coming back. "I've been doing this for 23 years and every year I think, 'This is the last year I'm going to do Elvira,' and then the next year, it's the same." What brings her back to the character she created to host the *Movie Macabre* show all those years ago? Her passion for entertaining and the natural high that comes from a good scare, of course. "Everybody's into horror movies. Horror and roller coasters have the same effect in that part of your brain," she opines. "It's the fight or flight response, but you're safe." Safe, that is, except from particularly determined rats... —PK & MM

DVD: COURTESY TIMELIFE VIDEO

FLESH & BLOOD

tapping the creative vein



HOLY ROLLERS

ALTERNATE HISTORY, RELIGION AND MAGIC COLLIDE IN *REX MUNDI*

Rex Mundi, the critically acclaimed Image comic, is *not* your normal comic book. Relaying the story of a doctor following a murder mystery in an alternate history Paris — stay with me on this — is as intricate a tale as it is a detailed explosion of art. Creators Arvid Nelson and Eric J are continuing the saga of physician Julien Sauniére as he pieces the puzzle of French politics, magic, the Church and one family's connection to the Knights Templar into the big picture.

"I'm more of a religion nut than a history nut," says writer Nelson, "but I'm most interested in the places where history and religion intersect. The gospels are the product of hundreds of years of political infighting, so they aren't any more authoritative than any other historical document. There is room for speculation about the life of Jesus. That's what *Rex Mundi* is about."

Shadowy Arvid Nelson (top) and heady Eric J transform history in *Mundi*

The detail Nelson puts into the book is brought to life by Eric J, who does "a ton of research for every issue. I have to try and curb those tendencies, but I still manage to go overboard. I think it makes for a better experience the more authentic *feeling* I can make the visuals."

"Comics are uniquely suited to this kind of story because it's so easy to integrate pictures and text," notes Nelson. "We ask our readers to process a lot of information, and I don't think it would be digestible in any other format. Comics are sometimes stereotyped as juvenile and shallow, but I think they offer enormous potential for telling a complex story like *Rex Mundi* in a way that's fun and interesting."

Mundi came about in its own whirlwind. "Honestly, when I first met [Arvid] in San Diego in '99, I didn't hold much hope that he would get in touch with me after the con, or, if he did, that I would be at all interested in what he had to pitch to me," the artist says. "He did get in touch with me and the idea was right up my alley. I said yes and we started developing the book within, like, a week of the con. *Rex* just happens to be about things that interest Arvid and I both immensely."

"Eric has been vital to *Rex Mundi* since its inception," the writer says. "I came to him with a vague idea for an occult/historical mystery set in an alternate-history Paris. We developed the story together and act as each other's editors. We don't have any choice! It's just Eric, me and Jeromy [Cox], our colorist."

The characters are another story. There are a lot of them, but don't get that attached to them (a trade of the first arc is available, as are the single issues of the rest). "I like to be ruthless about whom I kill, whom I banish and whom I let live," Nelson says slyly. "Absolutely nobody is safe. The most important character to be introduced in the second arc is [Duke of] Lorraine's daughter, Isabelle. We're going to see that Lorraine's personal life is less-than-idyllic…"

It's also this family dynamic that stands out for the artist. "There's a scene in *Rex* #12 between Lorraine and his daughter that was a lot of fun to draw because it's all that really intense back and forth stuff," Eric J enthuses. "I have to say right now though that when I get a chance to do some of the more over-the-top drama or action, I get a big kick out of it because so much of what goes on in *Rex* is subdued and subtle."

One thing in particular that makes *Rex Mundi* stand out is the praise the title has received. "The fact that it seems to resonate with so many people is more gratifying than I can describe," Nelson says. "It's still unreal to me, walking into a comic book store and seeing something I wrote on the shelves next to *X-Men* and *Batman*. *Rex Mundi* doesn't make me any money, quite the opposite, but the simple fact of having it published is more than adequate payment." —MM

MUDNI © A. NELSON & E. JOHNSON; DOGMITCH © D. SCHAFFER

BLACK MAGIC WOMAN

DAN SCHAFFER EXPLOITS THE DARK SIDE

Ask Dan Schaffer to explain *Dogwitch* and he goes into enthusiastic carnival barker mode: "*Dogwitch*: 21st century electric sex-magick to purge you of your preconceptions!

"It's not what you think it is! Eye-candy on the surface, post-modern schlock-horror underneath with a streak of nine-inch-heel-girl-power straight through the middle. Violet Grimm, outcast sorceress and arcane fetish-witch superstar, has jammed a firecracker in the eye of acceptable modern witchcraft, among other things. Think this is just another tits-and-ass book? You're only half right.

"I feel like I ought to follow it up with, 'more bang for your buck!'" he laughs.

Dogwitch taps into a little bit of everything in the underbelly of society. "It's all skullduggery, really," the creator notes. "If I was going to make an impressive debut on the indy comic scene, the product was going to have to be audacious! An electric, reality TV, fetish-witch superstar was just my version of that." He takes a deep breath, "I dunno. It seemed like a good idea."

And it was a good idea, one that cornered its own market and picked up a rabid following. "I'm always fascinated by how different people respond to various aspects of the book. *Dogwitch* mocks and celebrates subculture constructs, modern paganism, schlocky horror, or anything from twisted patriarchal gender roles to neo-feminist acrimony. I'm always pleasantly surprised by the stuff people get out of each issue."

For the last two years, *Dogwitch* has come out from Sirius Comics consistently, and Schaffer's content with that. "The current story arc, which is basically the origin story, was written to run over three years. I honestly didn't expect to still be here after two, so I'm just taking it a day at a time, enjoying the ride. This arc will conclude at the end of the third trade. Whatever happens after that, I'll worry about when I get there."

Where he is now is a pretty good place. He's doing what he wants with his own creation.

"I set out writing *Dogwitch* on feminist starting blocks. Yeah, I know how that sounds," Schaffer concedes. "I tend to wander off the path and screw it up because I'm a guy. What you end up with is a strong, independent, alternative female role model who won't take crap from anyone and wears what the hell she wants to wear, but who acts more like a fetish-punk spice girl on drugs. This may all be in my head, but the idea was to make her defiant and kinky, but not exploitative. Self-exploited by choice, sure, but that's something else entirely. And that's what *Dogwitch* is all about — the right to use your own gifts to please yourself in any way you see fit without relenting to social pressures or ideologies. Violet's choices are autonomous, and her personal style is her own decision. *Dogwitch* is about the beauty of rebellion, even when it's against the odds or against yourself. It's about the joy of deviance. I'd like to say that it attacks the comics patriarchy from within by feeding it latex-coated feminism, but I don't suppose anyone would believe me!"—MM

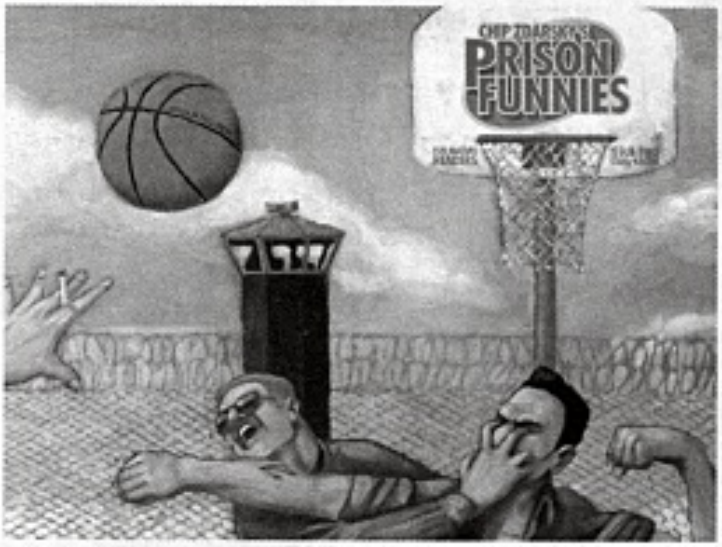
Dan Schaffer and his witchy woman

FLESH&BLOOD

TAPPING THE CREATIVE VEIN

BOY FROM OZ

PRISON FUNNIES MASTERMIND CHIP ZDARSKY DISCUSSES HIS TWISTED CREATION, AS WELL AS HIS STRAIGHT ONE, *MONSTER COPS*. By Tom LaSusa



There's nothing funny about prison. It's a violent place where dog eats dog, you sleep back against the wall and you're always looking over your shoulder to see if someone's coming at you.

Chip Zdarsky knows this all too well. After a joke on his ex-girlfriend went horribly wrong, Zdarsky found himself a "guest" of one of Canada's prison facilities for 30 days. That experience was the catalyst for *Prison Funnies*. Offering a glimpse into the gritty, bleak world of hard time, the strip-turned-comic usually succeeds at eliciting nervous chuckles, uncomfortable laughs and occasional nausea.

Zdarsky took some time out of his hectic work schedule (read: therapy) to talk about *Prison Funnies*, as well as his latest, *Monster Cops* (a *Cops*/Vampirella crossover is on the next page).

Be warned. Chip Zdarsky is a complex individual. Personal demons and ghosts of the past haunt him. As a result, some of his answers may shock you. They may horrify you.

More than likely you'll just wonder what he's smoking, and where you can get some.

Vampirella Magazine: How did your brief stay in jail inspire you to create *Prison Funnies*?

Chip Zdarsky: When you think of jail, one word comes to mind — friendship. My time behind bars was littered with all sorts of great, caring guys who really redefined for me what a true friend can be. Yeah sure, some guys hit me. Some of them hit hard enough to break a couple of ribs. But you know what? Bones heal. Massive hemorrhages clot. Friendships, those can last for months. That's the true inspiration for *Prison Funnies*.

V: How did *Funnies* blossom from a college strip to this incarnation, online and in print?

CZ: It "blossomed" on the day that I decided that I no longer wanted to do it for free and instead wanted to pay money to make it. Self-publishing has been so rewarding, emotionally.

V: Any of the recurring characters based upon actual individuals?

CZ: It's been pointed out to me that most of the "disposable" characters resemble me. I don't see it myself, but what do I know?

V: Any one particular character you have a soft spot for?

CZ: A good storyteller would have a character that represents the Every Man, thrown into the situation so we can experience all the other characters through his eyes. Sadly, I killed him in the first issue. He would have been my favorite had he lived.

V: Let's talk about *Monster Cops*. Where did that come from?

CZ: I was tired of being arrested for handing out copies of *Prison Funnies* to kids in playgrounds. I needed something with less violence and swearing so as to gain the trust of teachers and attractive single mothers.

V: But why Monster "Cops?" Why not Monster Accountants or Monster Token Booth Operators?

CZ: I think everyone likes the idea of bad guys trying to redeem themselves, I just thought it would be funnier for them to have to deal with the bureaucracy of redeeming themselves by making them part of a police force.

Also, it just seemed like a natural progression from me doing adult prison comics to all-ages police comics. Now *that's* going to be quite the awkward crossover.

V: In the Monster Cops/Vampi crossover, you allude to a romantic past between Dracula and our heroine. What do you think ruined it for those crazy kids?

CZ: Well, first of all, I want anyone reading this to know that I'm well aware of the part Dracula played in Vampirella's confusing history! Unfortunately, I had to toss it all as it contradicted the nature of this crossover. Sorry!

Anyhoo, vampires dating vampires is boring. Like accountants dating accountants. I think vampires should only date vampire hunters as it adds a wonderful degree of tension to their relationship. Or, for example, interviewers dating interviewees.

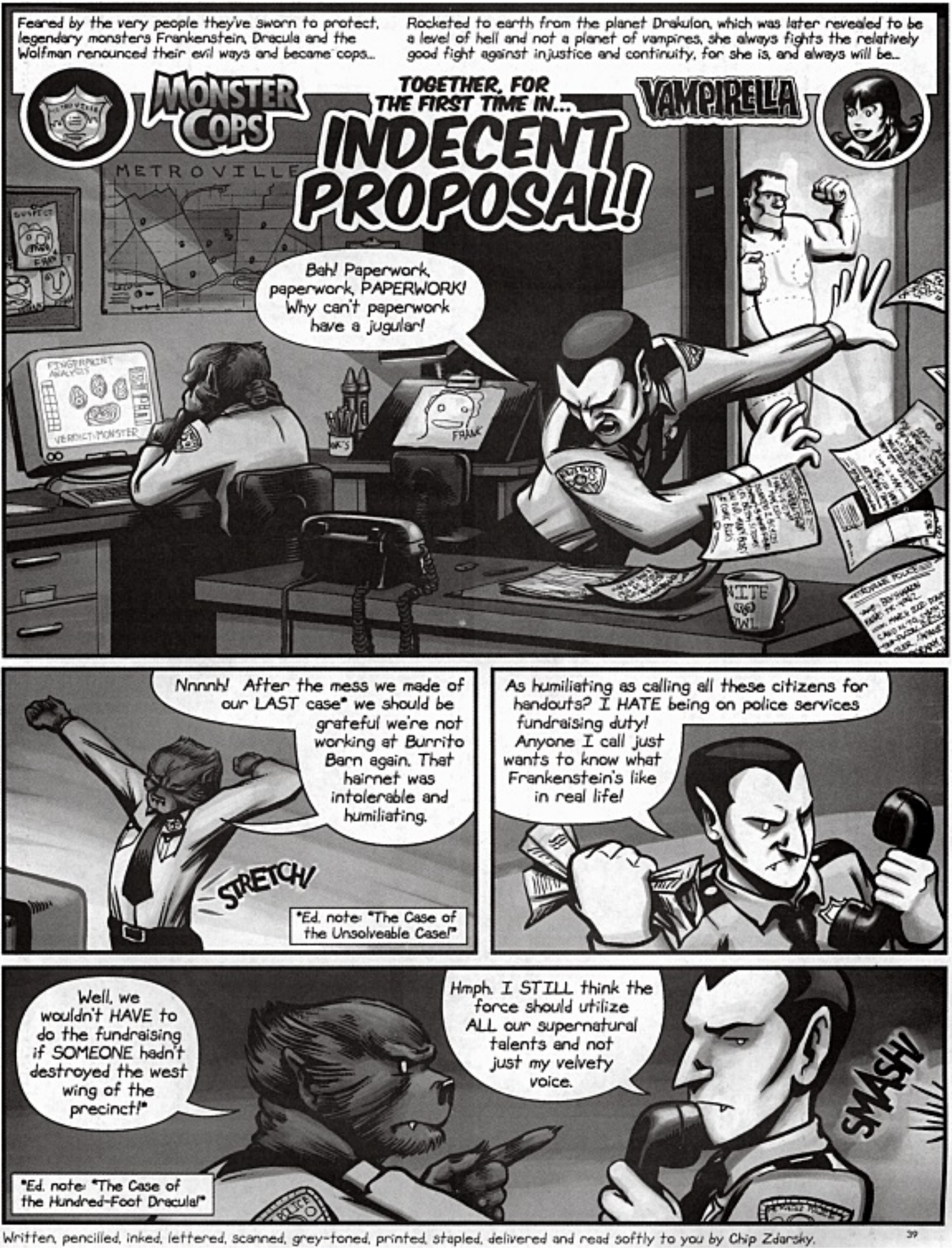
If you know what I mean.

V: Biblically, Chip. Biblically.

Shenanigans in The Yard and Monsters with Badges all by Chip

(For the full, unedited interview of this and the rest of Flesh & Blood, check out vampirella.com.)

PRISON FUNNIES & MONSTER COPS © CHIP ZDARSKY & STEVEN MURRAY


Feared by the very people they've sworn to protect, legendary monsters Frankenstein, Dracula and the Wolfman renounced their evil ways and became cops...
Rocketed to earth from the planet Drakulon, which was later revealed to be a level of hell and not a planet of vampires, she always fights the relatively good fight against injustice and continuity, for she is, and always will be...
MONSTER COPS
TOGETHER, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN...
INDECENT PROPOSAL!
VAMPIRELLA
METROVILLE
Bah! Paperwork, paperwork, PAPERWORK! Why can't paperwork have a jugular!
Nnnnh! After the mess we made of our LAST case* we should be grateful we're not working at Burrito Barn again. That hairnet was intolerable and humiliating.
STRETCH!
*Ed. note: "The Case of the Unsolveable Case!"
As humiliating as calling all these citizens for handouts? I HATE being on police services fundraising duty! Anyone I call just wants to know what Frankenstein's like in real life!
Well, we wouldn't HAVE to do the fundraising if SOMEONE hadn't destroyed the west wing of the precinct!*
Hmph. I STILL think the force should utilize ALL our supernatural talents and not just my velvety voice.
SMASH!
*Ed. note: "The Case of the Hundred-Foot Dracula!"

Written, pencilled, inked, lettered, scanned, grey-toned, printed, stapled, delivered and read softly to you by Chip Zdarsky.

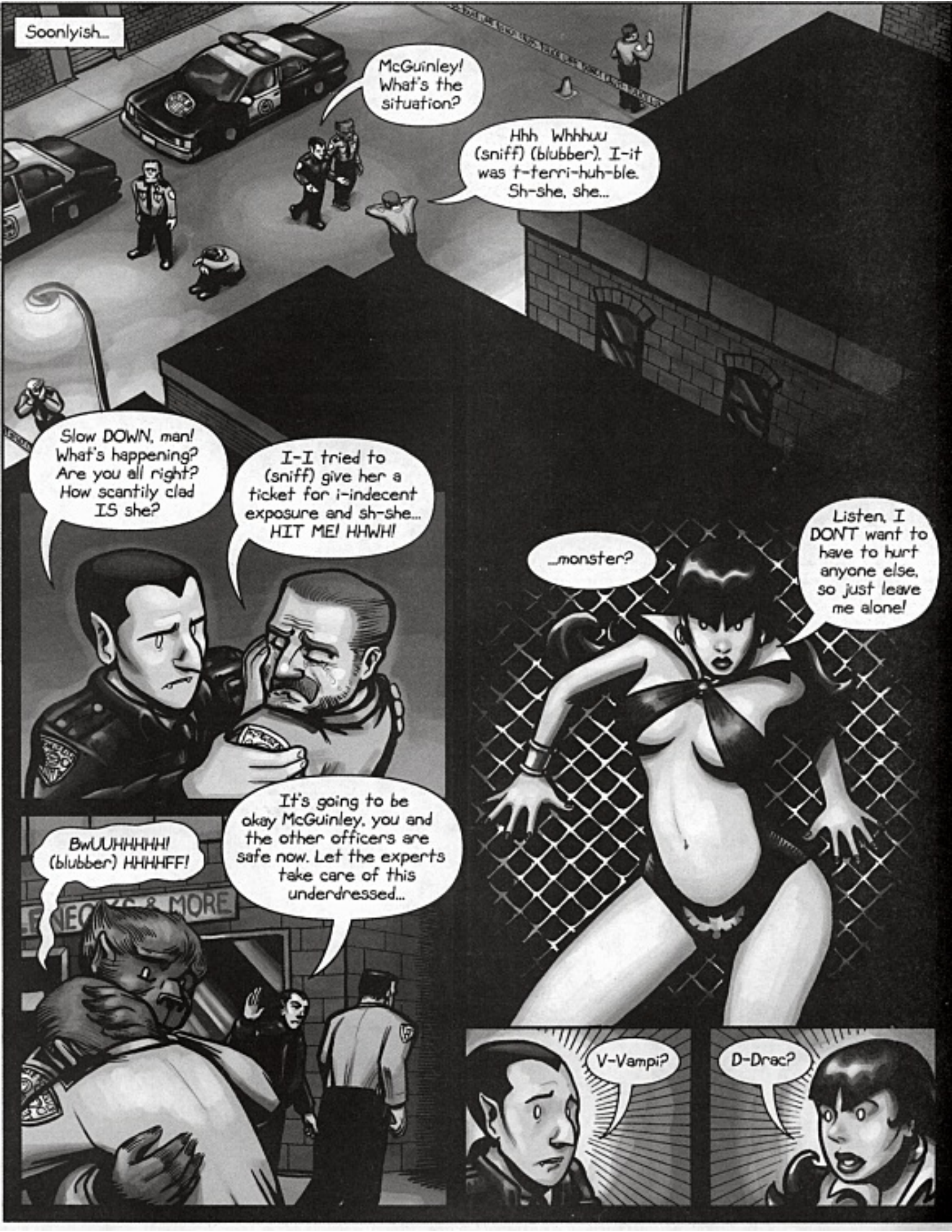
Voices in box sound scared. Frank tried to help them, but Frank think he hurt them!
FZZT!

It's all right Frank, they're over here now.
CLICK

...ficer down! There's a SCANTILY CLAD FEMALE VAMPIRE resisting arrest at the corner of Street Ave. and Road St. and Avenue Rd!*
*Ed. note: "The Case of the Unfortunate By-Laws."

I repeat, there's a...

17th PRECINCT
DO NOT CROSS


Soonlyish...
McGuinley! What's the situation?
Hhh Whhhuu (sniff) (blubber). I-it was t-terri-huh-ble. Sh-she, she...
Slow DOWN, man! What's happening? Are you all right? How scantily clad IS she?
I-I tried to (sniff) give her a ticket for i-indecent exposure and sh-she... HIT ME! HHWH!
...monster?
Listen, I DON'T want to have to hurt anyone else, so just leave me alone!
BwUUHHHHH! (blubber) HHHHFF!
It's going to be okay McGuinley, you and the other officers are safe now. Let the experts take care of this underdressed...
V-Vampi?
D-Drac?

You look well.
You too.
Yes, well, "eternal youth" and all.
Of course.
Frank confused. Is pretty lady Drac's friend?
Of...a sort. Frank, this is Vampirella. We used to, um...
...DATE. Is that so hard to SAY, Dracula?
We went out TWICE. I hardly think that counts as "DATING."
Whatever. Anyways, it looks like you're big man on campus now, OFFICER Dracula. Could you PLEASE tell these rubes to leave me alone? I'm just passing through this back-water city.
Ah, I'm sorry about that. Metroville's a pretty conservative place and their "indecency" laws are a tad strict.
Even so, I'm NOT going to take you back to the station.
Great!
But, I AM going to have to give you a ticket, which you can pay at the address on the back before you leave town. 25 bucks.
METROVILLE POLICE
"Force for good, not evil!"
Violation: Indecent Exposure
Name: Vampirella
Amount: $25.00
OFFICER

I-it's just that nobody's ever H-HIT me (blubber) before. I feel so...so...hhh...
Shhh...it's okay, McGuinley. Theresa's coming down right now to take you home. You've got some vacation time coming up, so I've made a few calls and...
Dog-Man! Come quick! Help Frank!
Frank! What is it? What's happened?
The pretty lady punched Drac-oola and jumped away and Drac-oola went after her and left Frank and Frank sad now!
DARN! (sniff) I've got their scent, Frank! Let's roll!
CLAP! CLAP! CLAP!
Vampirella! Stop!
Never! These human laws mean nothing to me! And they SHOULD mean nothing to YOU as well!
We LIVE among humans! We have to respect their laws! I became an officer to prove that we can be a part of society! That we can work together!
Don't you DARE lecture me! I help humans every day. I just refuse to be controlled by them, unlike SOME vampires!

Look, I'm sorry I never called. I was going through a lot of...
...stuff...
CREAK!
POP!
CREAK!
SNAP!
KRSPLASH!
GAHH!! HOLY WATER!! IT BURNS!
Wh-what? That's ridiculous! It couldn't...
Water... ...tower...on top of...church mission... ...was...blessed...when it opened...last... ...month...in a... ...very nice... ...ceremony...

CLICK
CLICK
They're specially designed for ALL types of monsters, even ones from "Drakulon."
Wha? I can't believe you'd trick me like that!
I can't believe you'd refuse to pay a ticket! I mean, seriously, it's just 25 bucks!
I-I just wouldn't know where to go.
What? I just TOLD you. It's printed on the ticket.
You what?
I KNOW. I just...I...
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO READ!*
*Ed. note: This story takes place before Vampirella knew how to read.
I-I don't understand.
Freeze!
Freezie!
When I first appeared on Earth I knew how to speak "English," but I never had the ability to READ it. Sure, I picked up some words over the years, but I've never had the chance to properly learn. It's why I got so defensive all those years ago...
...on our date! I remember how when I asked you what the specials were on that chalk board at the Olive Garden, you got angry and refused to answer! I thought you were just being a jerk!
I-I'm sorry I hurt those officers. I'll take whatever punishment is required of me.
Shhh... it's okay...
...I've got a better idea.

Two months later...
They're here! They're here!
MUG SHOTS
WOW! Those look fantastic! That was a great idea having Vampirella work off her sentence by posing for our fund-raising calendar!
AND in the meantime teaching me to read!
Oh, Frank, you look so wonderful, but seeing all your scars still makes me sad! How did you get THIS one?
Beauty & the Monk!
Biking accident. Frank no like to talk about it.
Vampi, now that we can afford to rebuild the precinct's west wing there's going to be more space and funds for extra cops...so, would you stay? Wear the uniform?
Oh Drac, you've all been so good to me and I feel like this could be a wonderful life, but the road I travel on must be travelled suggestively and alone.
I understand. But, before you go, perhaps we could have...one more date?
Nope!
The End!

TOYCHEST

NEW THINGS TO PLAY WITH

DEADLY FASHION

Watch out! These little strumpets coming down the runway this fall may be on the cutting edge of couture but they aren't your typical fashion victims. This quartet of gruesome girlies is dead... the Living Dead!

Introducing Hollywood, Inferno, Sybil and Lulu, these strikingly-dressed 13 inches of lethal plastic are soft in all the right places, have accursed curves and deadly articulation. They're the latest series of **Living Dead Dolls** from the twisted minds of Ed Long and Damien Glonek. Long and Glonek are no longer personally hand-making each and every doll the way they did when they first launched their macabre line of toys in 1998, but each doll painstakingly manufactured by Mezco is exclusively designed by the duo.

The dolls are one part femme fatale, one part fashion diva and one hundred percent living dead! Each comes with a detailed pin-up sized "Fatal Statistics" poster to give you and "in death" look at the afterlife. The greatest feature of this fearsome foursome is that they each come with two outfits, perfect for their multiple personalities!

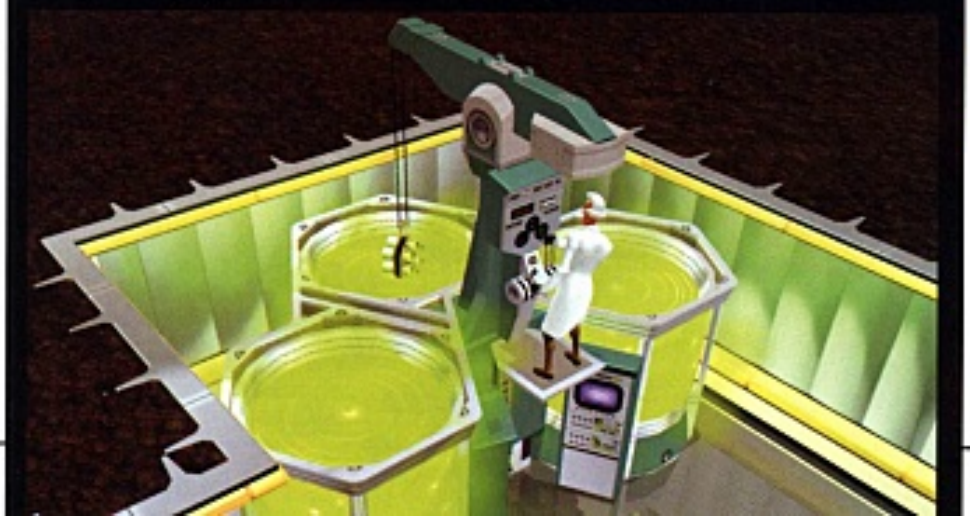
In the high world of fashion it's the details that count and these undead have more than enough; fishnets, fur and pearls for Hollywood; tattoos, confederate flag belt buckle and cowboy hat on Lulu, and our favorite, the Clockwork Orange Sybil complete with bowler and cane! The girls have the most haunting eyes you'll see anywhere. These dolls are definitely not for children but if you're looking for that demonic fashion accessory you can't go wrong with the Living Dead Dolls, Fashion Victims, series II.—JB

EEEE-VIL!

Everyone wants to be the bad guy: they have more fun, laugh that great evil laugh, they get the girls first and they have henchmen. Henchmen!

Coming to the PC this fall from Vivendi Universal Games is **Evil Genius**, spoofing '60s spy flicks and letting you rule your own secret lair, complete with henchmen (Henchmen!), gals and gizmos.

Real-time fighting is joined by base-building, training, research and sending your henchmen (Henchmen!) to their ultimate fates.



SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND

In an explosion unlike anything seen before, Vivendi Universal announced that they are bringing the hit movie, ***Scarface***, to game consoles beginning Fall 2005.

The game, an original story written by David McKenna (*American History X* and *S.W.A.T.*), recreates historical Miami and chases around the Florida Keys and the Bahamas. Players fight rivals and the DEA, all the while attempting to rebuild a fallen underworld empire. And to stay alive and keep shooting.

HELLSBELLS

MUSIC SOOTHES THE SAVAGE BEASTS

Shane Tassart, front/center, and Best of Seven

BEST OF ITS KIND

BEST OF SEVEN ROCKS WITH "EVERYTHING"

LA-based Best of Seven pounds the stage with their brand of rock. That's right, simply rock. Don't try to label them, insists frontman Shane Tassart, just listen. You'll probably like what you hear. The new EP, "Everything is New Again," is five tracks showcasing BO7's blend of modern rock with classic riffs, excellent vocals and catchy lyrics. Tassart takes a little time out of a hectic schedule to chat about the Best of Seven live show, Peter Criss and a bit of celebrity. It's not always pretty, but it's rock and roll, and Tassart wouldn't have it any other way. —MM

VAMPIRELLA MAG: Let's take a look at your major influences.
SHANE TASSART: KISS was my first influence, especially Peter Criss (I started out a drummer). I met him a few years ago and told him that I didn't know whether to shake his hand or punch him out for leading me into the music business. He asked for a handshake. He was a cool guy.
V: The band's been described as "Nu-Breed Rock." What does that mean to you?
ST: I have no idea what it means. I have just always said that we were an alternative to the alternative. Listen, no one that is making music is reinventing the wheel. It is still the three basic chords over and over and over again.
V: What do you think of labels?
ST: I remember growing up and listening to the radio; you would hear so much variety. Now, they label everything into these stupid formats. Rock 'n Roll is Rock 'n Roll, whay label it anything else?
V: In 10 words or less, tell us something about the rest of the band.
ST: Joe [Casey, lead guitar and vocals] keeps me on my toes because he plays Devil's Advocate a lot and helps me see what I sometimes miss. A talented guy who knows how to work the stage. Darrell [Arnold, bass]: A true promotion king with a heart of gold, also one hell of a rocker!

Rob [Wood, drums] is like the older brother that I never had. To use 10 words to describe him is way too hard. He has always believed in me and I will always appreciate his loyalty. No mater how many times I fuck things up! He sometimes is the Best of Seven show!

V: How does a live show feel?

ST: Our live show is honestly our biggest selling point. We have the Cheap Trick Syndrome, we have yet to capture the energy we have live in a sterile studio. You have Joe, jumping up and down rocking, Rob the human cartoon, Darrell, Nikki Sixx's long lost brother, and me and my Les Paul begging for people to love me. What. A. Show!

ILLUSTRATED TUNES

Two CDs and the Comics That Inspired Them

MATT DEGENNARO AND PHIL ELLIOTT

Tupelo: The World's Forgotten Boy
Slave Labor Publishing
(www.slg.com)

Recounting the birth, disappearance and reemergence of Captain Tupelo and The Famous Monsters, *Tupelo* tells a punk rock tale, with a "Wake up and think for yourself" undercurrent. The five packaged tracks provide the punk foundation for the book, with the screaming "Red Pajamas" and "Little Bit O' Pretty" but it's "Murder Time" which makes the biggest impact.

Tupelo's actions in the comic seem to mirror the chaotic, quick feel of "Murder Time." The character, both avenging angel and innocent victim, is shown to be something beyond the norm. Possessing abilities triggered by alcohol or drugs, Tupelo demands pity whether for his treatment by his protector and band mate, The 11 O'Clock Man, or the horrors suffered upon him in the mental institution he's dragged off to by the controlling media conglomerate that's been keeping the people down by overloading the system and denying them "Free Mind Time."

Tupelo is fascinating. In between chapters, there are "excerpts" from Famous Monsters interviews, there are notes that enhance the story, there are pieces that put the whole thing together.

While there are no true credits on the CD, credit should go to Matt DeGennaro and Phil Elliott who spun a singular effort into a unique multi-media project.

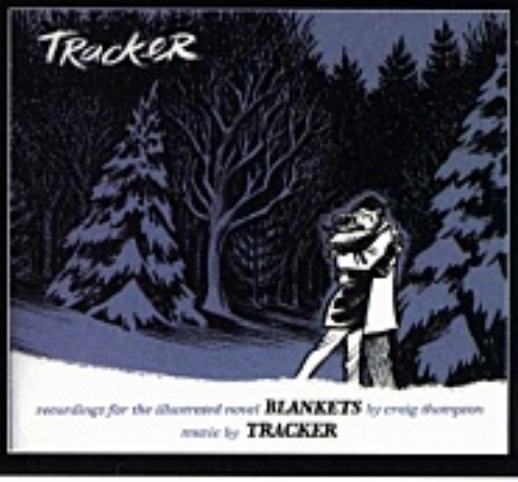
TRACKER

Blankets
Top Shelf Productions
www.trackermusic.com
www.topshelfcomix.com

A soundtrack of sorts for the multi award-winning original graphic novel *Blankets*, this CD is haunting and sultry, almost more than the book itself. The instrumental tracks feel like young love and loss, as if one were questioning each choice made. Childhood innocence breaks through on "Vanishing Cave." "Stirring Furnace" plays against its drum beat and "Everything is Beautiful," the only lyrical song on the CD, nicely wraps it up.

Reading the book alongside the CD is an pleasing experience, enhancing the sensitive aspects of Craig Thompson's story, and highlighting the impact of the interaction, or even lack of interaction, between the characters.

Blankets, itself, is an emotional experience, Tracker's music just makes it more so.



GRAVE ROBBERS FROM OUTER SPACE

Horror Story
www.sprocknrock.cjb.net

You gotta love the theme bands. Grave Robbers From Outer Space goes all the way from the make-up to the songs. Tracks like "Devil Girl from Mars," "Urban Horror Story," "Thirteen Moons" and "Magic Murder Show" showcase their down-and-dirty style, and just tell you how much fun they're having.

Based in New Zealand, this horror punk band completely dives into what it does. In that peculiar way, the words "undying love" totally explain why they do what they do. Horror hard-core to the core, Horror Story keeps the midnight fires burning, looking to do a comics crossover with Michael T. Gilbert's *Mr. Monster*, who has allowed the band to reference the character on the album.

Horror Story is wicked comic fun.

AUTHORITY ZERO

Andiamo
www.authorityzero.com

Modern rock sensibilities fused with ska and punk, Authority Zero entertains intensely.

And insists you not only listen, but hear.

The well-played cover of "Mexican Radio" comes near the end of *Andiamo* and surprises you because you recognize it, but the other tracks feel more at home. Politically revved, with great guitar work and lyrics that slap you in the head, *Andiamo* is the kind of CD you put on and listen to. It's not background noise; it's *something*. Authority Zero is a band to watch out for, if you've missed it the first time around.

LUNACHICKS

WHEN THE MOON IS FULL THEY RISE

Acid PopTart

Dark Beauty, Demanding Confidence

For quite some time now, Anastasia Heonis, aka Acid PopTart, (www.acidpoptart.com) has been a staple of underground modeling. "A lot of guys love the dark, Goth look and I mean guys from all walks of life," she says. "With the long dark hair, smoky eyes, and fishnets, I think I embody the femme fatale and everyone loves the dangerous gal!" She not only loves her work, but loves writing about it, too, as senior writer at *Gothic Beauty Magazine*.

VAMP: What is sexy?

APT: Without a doubt, the sexiest thing is confidence. Sure, I love sliding into an all vinyl outfit and some wicked heels, but what makes that outfit is the confidence to pull it off. I can walk in jeans and a tank top and still get looks and it has to do with *confidence*. If someone wants my attention, they need to have confidence. Bling-bling, fancy cars, a wad of cash doesn't impress me; a man who talks to me like a human, who's interested in what I have to say, *that's* sexy. An intelligent mind is *very* sexy.

V: When did you first hear of Vampirella and what attracted you to the character?

APT: I first got into comics during the whole "bad girl" boom of the early 90's and it was then that I was picked to be the official *Razor* cover model. I checked out every bad girl book out there, but there were very few of real substance. I knew Vampirella was going to be a character I liked because of the mere attitude she seemed to possess.

V: You take a lot of inspiration from the sexploitation films of the 70's.

APT: It's actually my dream to bring back some of these films, with a modern twist and some stronger storylines. I want to create a film that embodies those strong women who aren't afraid of their sexuality but don't have to run around in heels and bikinis, and playing the damsel in distress. Since I'm also into cars and streetracing, I want to show off women who can change their own oil, jump in a catsuit, race a man, beat him and apply her lipstick afterwards. I want to create the atmosphere that was so important then, with over-the-top sets and over-the-top actors and, of course, over-the-top costumes.

V: What turns you on, excites you?

APT: I do love strangeness. I don't like something that looks like everything else. I love guys in eyeliner because it takes balls for a guy to put on eyeliner and walk down some of the streets here in town!

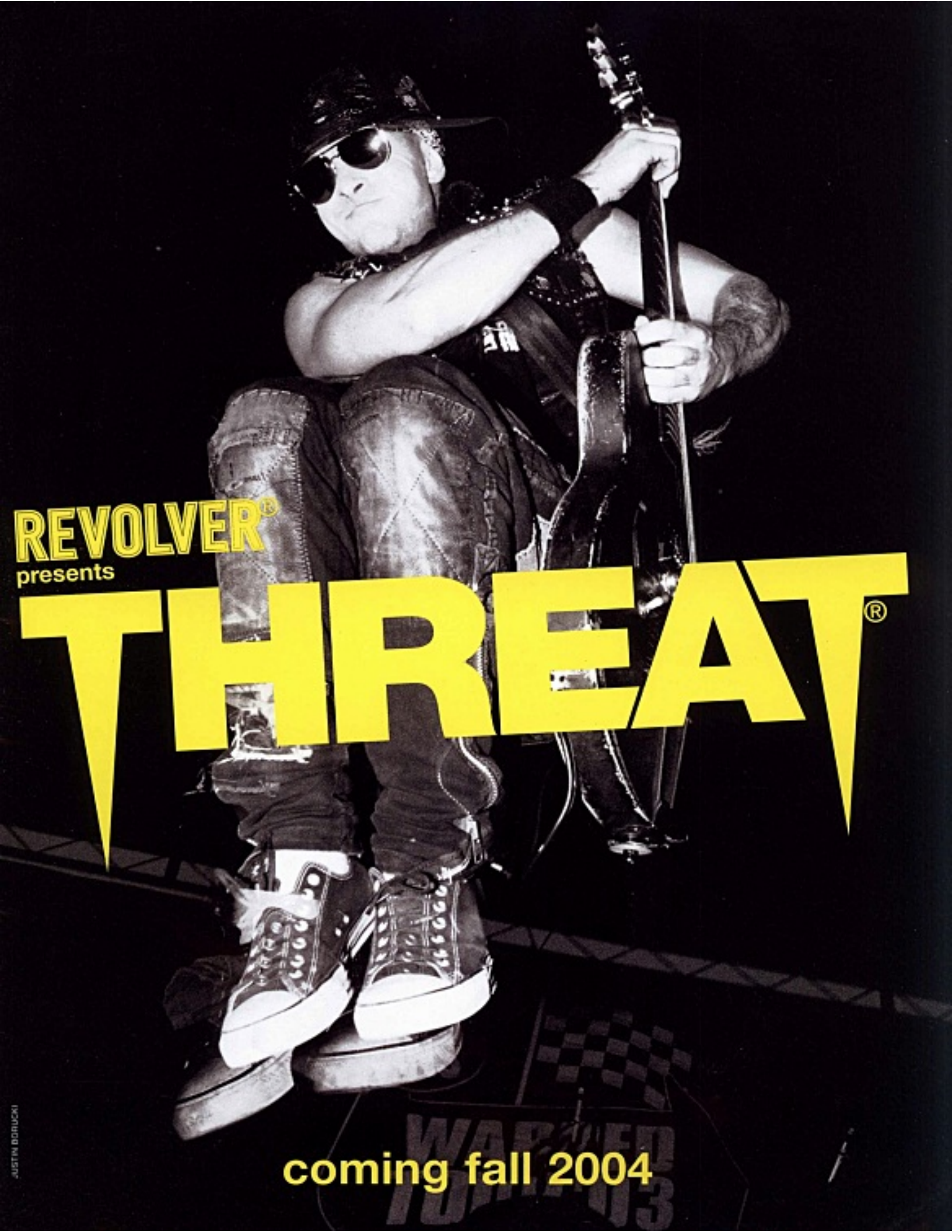
V: You like "over-the-top looks, things that make people stop and stare?" How does that make you feel when you can freeze someone like that?

APT: It's power. And power can be intoxicating. Sure, I get screamed at, insulted, I've even been threatened, but I'm use to this. I remember this old man at a gas station when my best friend and I were getting gas on our way to a club, and he comes across the parking lot yelling, "Daughters of Jezebel! Whores of Babylon!"

I feel sorry that their minds aren't open to being more accepting or even open for more knowledge.

On the flip side, I get all sorts of people who dig the way I look. I love it when these wonderful parents come up to me and bring their children who are a bit afraid to talk to me. They show them how I'm expressing myself and I think, "Wow, this is how I'm going to raise my kids!" —BA

Since the early days of Vampirella, many women have gone out of their way to portray the bloody vixen. At conventions, on Halloween, for photo shoots, for the Hell of it—it's been done time and again, with and without the prodding of others. Every month, you can meet one of these women who take their fandom to the next level. If you know of one, share. Send all packages to: **LUNACHICKS,** Vampirella Comics Magazine: 1115 Broadway, 8th floor • New York, NY 10010


REVOLVER®
presents
THREAT®
coming fall 2004
JUSTIN BORUCKI

Ghosthunter
IT'S A
LIVING HELL
MINUS THE LIVING
A routine disturbance call. A startling discovery. A catastrophe of supernatural proportions.
Now, trusting only in his paranormal abilities and a phenomenal array of weapons, Lazarus Jones is out to capture hordes of tortured souls who seek vengeance on the world of the living.
"Brilliant in every way!"
- play magazine
RATING PENDING
RP
Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.
PlayStation 2
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